

A Narrative Inquiry of Recently Separated African American Army Enlisted Soldier's  
Experiences on Racism

A Dissertation Proposal submitted  
to the Graduate School  
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Leadership

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology  
of the Dewar College of Education and Human Service

August 2020


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## ABSTRACT

The United States Army (U.S. Army) is the oldest and a leading public organization in the U.S. that has challenged racism with attempts to remove many barriers that did not allow for workforce equality and unlimited growth (Moskos & Butler, 1996). Even so, the U.S. Army struggled for years with institutional racism and issues of discrimination. Understanding how systemic racism and acts of racism affect the core of the U.S. Army organization is important in the 21st century and may assist other organizations and leaders in understanding how African Americans experience institutional racism.

Many studies on racism and race issues in the U.S. Army use a quantitative lens. Furthermore, most research, books, and news articles center the research on the U.S. Army officer. That presents a gap in the understanding of how racism affects the U.S. Army as a total force. A narrative inquiry using enlisted soldiers with a Critical Race Theory framework adds to the limited research and may fill the gap in understanding institutional racism.

Eight participants volunteered for three 90-minute interviews that produce five themes of qualitative data. The themes that emerged were (1) The premilitary racial bubble, (2) In-service game-changers of racism, (3) Post military polarization, (4) The overt and covert nature of racism, (5) Challenging core values. The themes provide a unique voice of color that adds to the knowledge of racism of marginalized voices that were brought forward when narrating through four questions. The questions asked were how the participants experienced racism (1) before, (2) during, and (3) after serving in the understanding about racism?

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## Acknowledgements

Life has many phases to navigate in a journey that will define a person's life work, contributions, and purpose. No one arrives to their destination in this journey alone. It takes a collaboration from a team of stakeholders, cheerleaders, and fans to help navigate through to the end. I would like to take the opportunity in this space to express to the team of people who assisted me along this particular phase.

I would like to thank my wife and children for their patience and understanding as I sacrificed movie nights and family outings while I chiseled away at my studies. I owe you a big vacation. I also would like to thank my mom, who always reminds me that "...if no one loves me, remember that God and I do".

Thank you to the coaches, parents, and team members of Dynamic Speed Elite Track club. You all gave me the inspiration to "MOVE"! Your encouragement was an important piece that ensured that I did not break stride in the middle of this marathon. Coaches, thank you for picking up my slack and filling the gap as I took a step back to focus on this project.

Many thanks to my co-workers with special mentions to Dr. Kimberly Grimes-Solomon, Dr. Chris Bennett, Mike Montgomery, Dr. Debora Lee, and Ms. Casandra Smith. Your daily inspirations meant a lot. To Timothy Bryant, Mr. Fred Catchings, and Mr. Leroy "Daddy" Gibbs your mentorship and wisdom were the keys to the strength of my mental and professional armor.

And I would be remiss without mentioning the Valdosta team: Dr. James Archibald, Dr. Jamie Workman, and Dr. Dianne Dees. Thank you for your trust, advise, and commitment. Dr. Richard Schmertzinger thank you for sharing the endless possibilities and helping me to discover what is important in scholarship. Thank you to the Fall 2016 Valdosta Leadership cohort and the Leadership faculty and staff at Valdosta. A special thanks to the Library staff at Atlanta Metropolitan State College. Your professionalism and guidance was a great added value to this project.

Last, to the many veterans who inquired about this project, thank you. Your interest in being a part of this journey is noteworthy. Thank you to the eight veterans who participated for sharing your stories. I envision many contributions to future research because of your support.

## Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to all veteran servicemembers past, present, and future, who volunteer to serve this great country. Your contributions to the freedoms we cherish are paid for through your sacrifice.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

The United States Army (U.S. Army) is one of the most progressive public organizations in the United States of America (USA) that has challenged racism by instilling equality and opportunity in their workforce through policy and actions (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Loggins, 2016; Ellison, 1992; Moskos & Butler, 1996; Terry, 1985). Although the U.S. Army has moved progressively to address racism, systemic racism still manifests in different forms where people of color continue to feel the sting and the lingering bitterness of a century's old tradition. Executive Order 9981 signed by President Harry S. Truman on July 26, 1948, was the starting point for the U.S. Army to become the model for equality for African Americans in the workplace. Even so, the U.S. Army continues to struggle with systemic racism, diversity, and discrimination issues (Roithmayr, 2014). This qualitative study, using a critical race lens may offer leaders, educators, and policymakers of organizations a more definitive understanding of the challenges marginalized workers face.

There are few qualitative studies on systemic racism as an issue in the U.S. Army (Downing, 2012; Loggins, 2016; Mencke, 2010; Moskos & Butler, 1996). Many of the studies on racism and race in the U.S. Army are quantitative studies. Furthermore, Moskos and Butler (1996) reported that most research, books, and news articles center the research on the U.S. Army officer and take a quantitative approach. That presents a gap in the understanding of how racism affects the U.S. Army as a total force. Loggins

(2016) suggested that the gap in qualitative research studies on enlisted service members perceptions of racism in the U.S. Army in a Post 9/11 era is sparse. A qualitative approach using a Critical Race lens adds to the body of knowledge, challenge the policies, and provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions of racism.

Scholars offer evidence that supports that the United States and the U.S. Army's social and political ideology reflects the American narrative on systemic racism (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Ellison, 1992; Moskos & Butler 1996). The mainstream narrative positioned by White leadership, history, social, political, and educational constructs is that the U.S. Army from WWII to the Post 9/11 has made tremendous steps in dealing with race issues within its ranks (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Ellison, 1992; Loggin, 2016; Moskos & Butler, 1996; Terry, 1985). However, the counterargument from many African Americans is that much of the institutional racism and bias still exists and causes contradictions to the Army's policies on equality (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Roithmayr, 2014). Political and bureaucratic reluctance to allow full equality in the ranks for African Americans follows the theme of the African American diaspora in the US that mirrors the current systemic racism in corporate organizations, leadership, education, politics, and social paradigms in America (Anderson 2016; Webb & Herrmann, 2002).

The U.S. Army has made progress when addressing equality through policy and reshaping the culture of its organization through the introduction of core values. However, the U.S. Army policy to resolve issues at the lowest level of leadership is an Army ideology and practice that contributes to the assumption that racism issues are not prevalent. Moskos and Butler (1996) contend that race issues within a commander's unit, is resolved at the unit level.

White male officers in the U.S. Army outnumber all minority officer groups combined (Roithmayr, 2014). The command dynamics in the leadership structure places White officers as leaders and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) primarily as subordinates. That is not to suggest that there are not minority officers or White NCOs. While there are minorities in officers' positions, White male officers are the majority who make most decisions at the unit level in the Chain of Command. This Army leadership structure continues as the traditional leadership preference in the U.S. Army, which mirrors larger corporate structures and educational systems in the US (Roithmayr, 2014; Burk & Espinoza, 2012; McGuire, 1983; Moskos and Butler, 1996).

The current political and social divisions based on racial acts, statements, and conflicts are a concern that infiltrates the U.S. Army. Moskos and Butler (1996), McGuire (1983) and Terry (1985) agree the systemic racism is an institution that African Americans have fought to demolish in the U.S. Army since WWII. The U.S. Army core values have played a pivotal role in dismantling the walls and barricades of racism of all forms. The intersection of enlisted soldier's Army core values conflict with the US mainstream social, economic, educational, and political ideology tenets in the recent years and pose a threat to the U.S. Army's continued progressive stance on diversity and equal opportunity (Roithmayr, 2014; Moskos & Butler, 1996).

Connecting the experiences of the enlisted soldiers to the experiences of the American narrative on systemic racism may provide leaders with a better understanding of the racism issues. Avoiding the discussions of marginalized voices directly impacted by systemic racism may only provide shelter for the problems that linger in polarized conversations. African American service member's narratives need a voice in a way that



can offer a more profound understanding of racism. Burk and Espinoza (2012) reflected on the importance of qualitative research in the area of racism in the military as opposed to quantitative, where qualitative accounts provide more profound meaning to lived experiences. This qualitative narrative adds to the limited understanding of how African Americans in a well-structured disciplined organization cope with systemic racism issues.

#### Statement of Problem

The research presented here focuses on enlisted soldiers' experiences on racism who served in the U.S. Army at different points in their lives. According to Moskos and Butler (1996) the United States military leads the effort on equality, race, and diversity over other large organizations in the civilian workforce in the US. For the past 45 years, the military has progressively forged ahead with their efforts in transforming the narrative for race relations, but according to Moskos and Butler (1996) there is still much work needed.

Burk and Espinoza (2012) and McGuire (1983) report that during World War II, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which opened the doors on integration in the military. The move was similar to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation decision during the Civil War. Moskos and Butler (1996) explained that the pressure of moral obligation and being successful in the war effort contributed to those decisions. Although the changes that ensued tilted the war effort in favor of a United States victory, in the same manner as the Civil War, the conditions for inclusion and equal opportunity for African Americans merely maintained the status quo. Even after Vietnam, scholars have pointed out that African Americans in the United States and U.S. military continued to fight for

equality where acts of systemic racism and micro-aggressions were an everyday hallmark (Moskos & Butler 1996; Terry 1985).

Throughout history, African American enlisted soldiers experienced challenges with racial issues in the U.S. Army, yet we have limited studies that address a deep understanding of this phenomenon (Burk & Espinoza, 2012). A qualitative study on this marginalized group represents the very essence of marginalized African Americans in the United States who are not in the military, who apply for college or enter the workforce.

#### *Associated Problems*

The U.S. Army takes the position that “everyone is green”. According to Bonilla-Silva (2015, 1997) and Delgado and Stefancic (2013) this position presents several issues. Not seeing color and idealization of sameness connects the U.S. Army with the American diaspora of fear of having conversations about race. The election of the first African American president has created an assumption that the US racial issues are no longer an issue. However, the policies of the 45th president and the ideology of his primary base serve as a contradiction to an ideal American culture where racism is not real (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Roithmayr, 2014).

Order and discipline in the military controls the bias narratives that have shaped how soldiers experienced racism. Rank and position work the same as power and status in the mainstream American culture. Soldiers are taught early to follow and conform to rank and position. Not having African Americans in key leadership positions in the military prescribe that White over Black serves a purpose (Delgado and Stefancic, 2002). Social, political, economic, and educational interest of mainstream America may have little differences and, in many instances, mirrors their military counterparts.

Michael (2015) asserted that race is often a polarizing factor in the social and political interest of Americans. Mere discussions of race issues strike fear into the minds of people and actions by organizations. Conversations about race are an uncomfortable subject between people of different races (Michael, 2015). It may be possible that some people fear that discussions on race will somehow label them as a racist. The perception is that if a person discusses racism, then somehow, they are a racist and the situation has the propensity of damaging a person's credibility and career. The U.S. Army bypasses this issue by promoting an "everyone is green" military and reward, such as a promotion is merit-based through individual accomplishments (Army Command Policy, 1999).

The controls of order and discipline influence the daily actions of the U.S. Army. The Army's core values challenge every soldier to focus on the mission. Soldier who steps outside of the defined lines of the core values exposes themselves to everyone in their unit. NCOs and Officers should swiftly readjust the soldier's focus on the mission using policies found in the Uniform Code of Military Justice and local unit policy (Army Command Policy, 1999). Other soldiers in the unit gain a sense of relief that the military is a fair and unbiased unit and deals with issues fairly.

As with all organizations, there are ways to circumvent a system. The U.S. Army does not have eyes everywhere as soldiers polarize into social and political groups. These groups can form informal power groups. Those social groups often segregate in the same manner as social and political groups in organizations in the US and construct power-based political interest.

Moskos and Butler (1996) showed that rank and position in the military is a respected commodity that can influence social group interest. Rank and position

becomes a deliberating factor that soldiers polarize and identify with in the U.S. Army. Gaining affiliation to rank and power is a tool used to create and harbor racist ideologies (McGuire 1983). The more rank and position a person achieve in the U.S. Army, the more they can control and influence policy with limited resistance from other leaders.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to provide a deeper understanding of racism from the voice of the enlisted soldier. The purpose was not to demonstrate nor support the assumption that racism is prevalent in the U.S. Army. The study addresses gaps in the research through a qualitative lens and gives a voice seldom reflected surrounding the issues of racism from African American enlisted soldiers. There are limited studies that provide a voice to the enlisted soldier and understanding of how racism affects this marginalized subcultural group. People who join the military bring with them a variety of social, political, educational, and economic experiences before, during, and post-military service. Understanding racism from their perspectives may help leaders at all levels in the military, universities, and corporate organizations develop policy and training that can help close the gap in institutional racism.

### Significance of the Study

Understanding how systemic racism and acts of racism affect the core of the U.S. Army organization is vital in the 21st century. After two centuries of institutional and systemic racism in the military, the U.S. Army unwittingly continues to harbor a lingering ideology of White male privilege and dominance (Burk & Espinoza, 2012). The current political discussions and the emergence of incidents within organizations, police actions, political conduct, and public outcry through demonstrations in the U.S. are

fueling a narrative that creeps into the Army culture. From those realities, the enlisted soldier's Army core values conflict with the U.S. mainstream social, economic, educational, and political ideology and what they believe about race after being in an environment where race should be a non-factor (Ellison 1992; Margo, 2004; Moore, 2010).

### Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the primary framework in this study. It challenges previous voices of power by opening the conversation to the voices that have little interest in the maintenance of power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Although CRT is the lead actor in this narrative on racism, other frames will pose as supporting arguments that CRT uses to strengthen the voice of the marginalized. The rationalization for supported theories is due to the decades of mainstream unaccountable demoralizing of minorities by White cultural values. Differential racialization and microaggressions are woven into the research and compliments the voices of the storytellers (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Crenshaw, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Wilson, 2017; Wong, Derthick, Saw, & Okazaki 2014). These frameworks provide a deeper and richer conversation to address the research questions.

#### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) proves to be the best framework to answer the research question for this study. Delgado and Stefancic (2002) argued that CRT places race and racism as the centerpiece of the discussion and challenges mainstream social and historical accounts of events through the lens of the marginalized and oppressed. CRT offers a narrative approach to argue against systemic racism on matters that the powerful

and privileged overlook as a normal and fair process, value, or tenet of social and cultural construction motivated by interest. CRT challenges the interests of those who wrote the laws and interpret them from social, political and economic positions (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

This study uses CRT as the prominent theory, which places race at the center of the discussion as a social construct. CRT ushers in the idea that race is a biased socially constructed ideology that one can explain as a part of the American culture (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 2011). Delgado and Stefancic (2002, 2012) argued that CRT includes a broad range of perspectives that include social, political, economic, and educational liberal constructed aspects that challenge traditional or mainstream historical and legal discourse. CRT taps into the rational thought of constitutional law and challenges that status quo through counter experiences.

The key tenets that Delgado and Stefancic (2002) outline for CRT are:

- That racism is normal.
- Interest convergence and the system thought of white-over-color serves a purpose.
- Race is part of social thought, and relations are socially constructed.
- Differential racialization and the shifting needs of the dominant society.
- The thought of historical evolution that employs the thought of intersectionality and anti-essentialism.
- The unique voice of people of color.

CRT involves these ideologies to address how race is perceived and from what perspective.

For example, power and privilege would see normalcy of policy and laws that would directly benefit the interest of those in positions of power and privilege with little regard to opposing interest.

The second example of CRT is that interest convergence plays to the benefit of White interest. The tenet hinges on the system of capitalism where marginalization is necessary to maintain a competitive edge. From the historical and scientific lens, racism is socially constructed and not a real thing. According to Delgado and Stephancic (2002) racism from this lens is subject to behavioral and cultural explanations.

CRT challenges that differential racialization is a convenience of labor based on the need of the dominant society. The historical trail in racism, intersectionality, and anti-essentialism sees racism through this lens as a means to control and maintain a labor force. The stereotypes that are constructed are the conditions used to maintain the specific types of labor and to deny opportunity.

Last, the 'unique voice' lens in CRT is the thought that marginalized people have a different perspective on racism and what is considered acts of racism compared to White perceptions and experiences. Many minorities view experiences in education, jobs, socio-cultural behaviors, and the political decisions differently than most Whites. Those experiences have validity, and the voice of those realities should have meaning and a place in education. White America controlled the history, education, and laws of minority groups. Accounts of their experiences were under published and not allowed to surface in any meaningful way. The unique voice allows those narratives to come forward for scrutiny.

Bell (1992) a lawyer, professor, and civil rights activist, is credited with the leading role in the development of CRT. Other noted scholars provided vital work in the evolution of CRT (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Harris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011). These scholars all supports the idea that CRT builds on the arguments and strategy trial lawyers use and offer a counter-story strategy that challenges the rationality of laws and policies by introducing the power and privilege that marginalizes groups. They also agreed that racism is firmly rooted in institutions in the U.S. and evolved as normative behavior. CRT is an effective tool in correcting the disparities of equality in the U.S. educational system as well. It has become a very resourceful theoretical frame used by scholars in other countries to examine how Eurocentrism thought has systematically overridden native and indigenous group's social, educational, linguistics, political, and cultural heritage and replace it with interest of European economics.

Using CRT provides this study with a strong foundation that has proven highly effective in a scholarly and legal argument due to what Bell (1980, 1992) calls interest convergence. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argue that interest convergence holds that racism provides a more significant benefit to the elite and working class. Legal and organizational policy changes when interest benefits the needs of White dominant groups and seems to discriminate against African Americans. For example, limiting the power of African Americans to roles as NCO demonstrates how interest convergence interacts with enlisted soldiers perceptions of decision-making and how and when military officers will intervene with enlisted issues.



Placing CRT and race at the center of enlisted soldiers experiences allowed a conversation to emerge that historical accounts overlook in U.S. Army history. Delgado and Stefancic (2002) discusses how many theorists of CRT agreed that the voice-of color is a viable component to understanding race. The voice of color thesis exposes that White people are more unlikely to know how people of color make meaning of their history and experiences. For example, the suggestion that the U.S. Army is all green or where White soldiers and leaders determine that they are colorblind which causes issues that lead to assimilation. Using CRT and other related theories will provide a better voice of understanding about how the voice of color strips African American leader's identity where race and systemic racism becomes a normal experience (Bell, 2008; Harris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

#### *Differential racialization*

Redmond, Wilcox, Cambell, Kim, Finney, Barr, and Hassan (2014) indicated that the perceptions of the Post 9/11 African American enlisted soldier may offer different perspectives based on the subcultural views and their experiences within the tenets of racism that intersect with politics, education, social, and economic experiences. Bonilla-Silva (2015) and Delgado and Stefancic (2012) propose that more than ever, CRT needs to address the tenets of the progressive changes of marginalized groups and the stereotypes that are created in poor, middleclass, affluent, educated or undereducated African Americans. These classifications is what Delgado and Stefancic(2012) points out as problematic in the Black community. U.S. Army soldiers' perception merge with the progressive changes of the U.S. culture, and racial issues result in microaggressions, essentialism, nationalism, and assimilation to the degree that institutional racism and acts

of racism changes from overt to covert identities and are undetectable by African Americans.

Understanding this phenomenon requires a deep entrenchment into the historical review of the literature. The limited amount of qualitative research on African American enlisted soldiers demonstrates the perceived value of their marginalized voices. The literature that provides support is in the historical accounts of the U.S. and U.S. Army's history, laws, and policies and helps support the CRT conceptional framework that helped to answer the research questions.

### *Microaggressions*

Bonilla- Silva (2015) argued that understanding acts of racism requires awareness of what types and acts of racism are going on. One of the conceptional theories is that race and acts of racism are normal. That is not to say that it is an acceptable practice. The normalcy is in the stereotypes and embedded nuances of speech and behaviors exhibited by all races. The slights are directed specifically towards people of color that is intentional or unintentional but has the intention to posture one's position as superior (Bonila Silva, 2015).

The slights are forms of microaggressions that are found in the social, political, educational, and economic values in U.S. culture. They interfere with the Army values and become themes that enlisted soldiers become increasingly aware. The research questions address how the enlisted soldiers deal with the ideology of microaggressions.

Microaggressions are a form of directed covert systemic racism where prejudice, stereotypical insults, thoughts, or actions stemming from a dominant group member towards a minority group member. According to Bonilla-Silva (2015) and Solórzano,

Ceja, and Yosso (2000), microaggression as an everyday form of racism and has replaced the blatant public forms of acts of racism with the subtle micro-aggressive form of racism towards people of color. The important presumption in microaggression behavior is that most people do not know that they are doing it (Solórzano et al. 2000; Pierce, 1995).

Pierce (1995) provides this definition of macroaggression:

. . . subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and kinetic. In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggression can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence” (p. 281).

In a recent study Wong, et al., (2014) report there is more research needed on microaggressions, and there is an incredible opportunity for scholars and researchers to add to the field of study. The recent research offers areas of research with supporting evidence of themes that correlated with microaggressions. For example, Wong et al, (2014) identified the following themes on microaggression; alien one’s own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness, assumption of criminality, denial of racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural norms, second-class citizenship, and environmental invalidation as the leading type of microaggressions from the White dominating class.

#### *Description of Microaggressions*

Alien [in] one’s own land theme points to the idea that African Americans are from another country other than the USA. That is a partial truth. Other nationalities immigrated to America; Whites forced slavery on Africans, and other Africans sold

Africans by force into servitude. The statement such as “. . . go back to Africa” has no relevance for African Americans because we were born here.

The ascription of intelligence statement ‘you are very articulate,’ for example, generalizes that African Americans are not articulate, and that person is rare. The microaggression also sparked controversial conversations about the use of African American English Vernacular (AAEV). For example, when a person points out that an African American speaks well asserts that African American subcultural languages and expressions denote inferiority. White slave owners forbade the use of African native language. Campbell, (1996) argues that the native languages and cultures of slaves from African merged into variations of the English language. Over time, African Americans with little education developed conflicting dialects of English that present educational systems and White American culture refuse to address or accept (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Michael, 2015). The result is that vernacular accents are acceptable from immigrants who continue to speak their native tongue, whereas African American accents are substandard unacceptable forms of communication.

Color Blindness is a theme that the military promotes as they strip recruits (officers and enlisted) of their identity to reprogram them as a member of an elite team. The military purports that “there is no color but the color green”. Other anecdotes are when people claim that they are colorblind and do not care what a person’s color; that they treat everyone the same. This form of microaggression demonstrates that color is unimportant, and personal treatment depends on a person’s position relative to the other person (Bonilla-Silva 2015).

The assumption of criminality assumes that people of color are innately prone to criminal behavior, and the systemic racism that marginalizes people of color disproportionately is an example of this type of micro-aggressive thinking (Alexander, 2010). Oppression is a forced branding or tattoo on the African American race. That tattoo is a consistent reminder and embedded in U.S. laws and police practices that continue to marginalize people of color. The embedded systemic racism that is in the laws and minds are the ink that penetrates the African American physically and mentally.

CRT challenges the assumption where interest convergence by stereotyping becomes an implicit bias and barriers for African Americans (Kang, 2005). Kang (2005) concluded that implicit bias and stereotyping was a significant issue for African Americans. All groups are prone to believe that African Americans have behavioral criminality dispositions contrary to other races and the presumption of criminality is a normal experience for most African Americans.

Wong et al. (2014) argued that the everyday thinking of White people suggests that the election of President Obama is proof that racism is not an issue in America. However, as we experience the controversy of President Trump's actions and policies and the reactions as a result, we understand that racism is still an issue. When African Americans attempt to point out the controversy from their experience to racist rhetoric, some White people present the "race card" ideology where the person of color's defense is a product of reverse racism.

The myth of mediocrity is a form of oppression and inferiority where social and behavioral scientist from 1920-1980, used evolution to support the White privilege and elite narratives. Theorist commandeered the educational system and teachers as their

research assistant to inflate scientific research that put races of people in hierarchal classes over the other (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Solórzano, et al, 2000). The residual outcome is an educational system based on quantitative statistical data that decides the intelligence of a person instead of a qualitative approach that measures intellect in a much better context (Woodson, 1933).

Campbell (1996) argues that Pathologizing cultural norms are forms of microaggression that assumes that African Americans cultures, experiences, and families are all the same. A good example is to assume that all African Americans came from Africa, or they all celebrate the same, and all like the same music, food, and fashion.

Second-class citizenship presents themes that African Americans face today. Many issues that stem from slavery to Jim Crow, racial profiling, driving while Black, hands up do not shoot, and the Black Lives Matter Movement vs. the Stand Your Ground laws. White people do not live in this reality and therefore the accounts are not real.

Environmental invalidation is the practice of generalizing one-parent homes where African American children come from a single parent and or dysfunctional home, or that a child is prone to misbehavior because they are African American. Other assumptions include that African American children are not intelligent, resulting in placing the student in lower level educational environments when they do not perform well.

Most microaggressions are extremely negative forms of communications that most people of color recognized and laugh off as trivial. Most African Americans will ignore the comments to save their job or prevent antiracist label as 'playing the race card' or an aggressive, confrontational Black person. People may understand that this

unintentional systemic form of racism may offer the opportunity to have a casual conversation about race while using research as the base of the conversation to educate the unknowing (Michael, 2015).

### Definition of Terms

**African American**-A culturally constructed ethnic group with a lineage rooted in slavery. Descendants of slaves in the United States of America perceived to have ancestry from various countries in Africa where darker race people assumed to have originated. People born in America whose skin color identifies them with slave ancestry. They have little documentation of their place of ancestral lineage, connecting them with an identifiable country. For example, people who are from a country such as France, Germany, and Ethiopia classify with their country as in French, German, and Ethiopian. African American is a classification used as an alternative derivative to identify marginalized slave descendants.

**Black(s)**-Any class of African American in the United States based on skin color, social group identification, and stratification. The term African American and Black are interchangeable by the person's preference. Many people in this ethnic group prefer Black or African American for them as their individual preference.

**Commissioned Officer**-the soldier's commission comes from the President of the United States of America. They will have at least 60 hours of college credit, or in most cases, a four-year degree and have gone through an academic Military Science Program. They are senior to enlisted by authority and responsibility (Field Manual 7-22.7, 2015).

**Deployment**-A deployment is the temporary relocation of a military unit to a geographical location where the unit will perform its primary mission. The mission can

be training, expeditionary, or wartime execution. The deployment usually includes all vital resources for independent mission requirements.

**Enlisted**-When a civilian volunteer for active duty service in the military for four years. Most will have only a high school diploma or GED. There are some cases where the enlisted will have some college and even completed a four-year degree (Field Manual 7-22.7, 2015).

**Noncommissioned Officer (NCO, Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, Drill Sergeant, First Sergeant/1SG, Sergeant /Command Sergeant Major**-An enlisted person in the pay grade of E-4 to E-9 with the responsibilities as a supervisor to soldiers of lesser rank. The pay grade E4 has two distinctions. One is a specialist, which has no supervisory responsibility, and the other is Corporal, which is a supervisor position. NCO's will have formal tiered leadership and supervisor training. (Field Manual 7-22.7, 2015)

**Veteran**-A person who has served in the armed or military forces, which includes the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard.

**White American**-The racial dominant ethnic group in the United States of American in terms of power based on capitalist opportunity, birthright, and social class. Any ethnic group from European countries who immigrated and assimilated to American culture other than darker-skinned people.

**Transitioning**-a phase of military exodus after enlistment is complete and the soldier decides to not re-enlist for continued service. Transition serves the purpose to prepare the soldier to re-entry into civilian life.

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**-The VA is a cabinet-level department of the U.S. Government responsible for comprehensive assistance to veterans.



**Institutional racism-** “Institutional racism refers to how a society’s institutions operate systematically, both directly and indirectly, to favor some groups over others regarding access to opportunities and valued resources. This concept helps explain how society can discriminate unintentionally against certain groups” (Delgado & Stefancic 2002).

**Structural Racism-** “when the members of the dominant group benefit from and thrive in a society built on the labor of enslaved people, indigenous people, or people of color” (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2012 p. 107).

### *Conclusion*

CRT as the conceptual framework provides the structure to keep issues that are present in racism as the focus of understanding enlisted soldiers’ perceptions about racism (Kim, 2016). The scope of CRT offers many tenets to explore racism.

Differential racialization looks at how dominant groups use minority groups based on their interest, which conforms to the ideas and theories on interest conversion (Bell, 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2013). Microaggressions are less overt forms of racism that legitimizes the normalcy of acts of racism. Microaggressions evade the legal parameters that have progressively wore down unconstitutional legal battles in the United States. Bonilla-Silva (2015) and Wong et al. (2014) provided empirical research on microaggressions and the idea that colorblindness devalues and erodes the African American cultural and historical positions in American culture.

Burk and Espinoza (2012) challenge the historical accounts of racism in the Army by demonstrating how CRT and history explain how institutional racism occupies and embeds within the tenets of the Army. Burk and Espinoza (2012) support the argument that the sparse amount of literature in the discussion of racism weakens scholarship on

understanding racism. They also address the need to examine the historical accounts of policies and laws that effect leaders' decisions in the military through a CRT lens.

CRT relies on counter re-story from the voice of the marginalized and historical fact to address social, political, educational, and economic injustices. The literature needed to support enlisted soldiers' perceptions of race resides in the combination of historical facts, cultural, and the soldier's experiences as artifact that point to a reality. The literature in this research provides the support needed for a better understanding and discovery of new knowledge.

This research presents the literature that supports the historical waypoints that demonstrate how racism has been perpetuated over time from WWII to the present. The methods section then sets up the steps and processes that the research used to frame the research to the conceptual framework and extract useful data that answers the research questions. The next chapter then present the data in rich re-stores from the experiences of the participants. That is followed by Chapter V where the analysis of the re-stories capture the essence of the participants lived experiences and connects the conceptual framework to the tenets of CRT. Last, Chapter VI offers the researchers final thoughts on the meaning of the re-stories and address the limitations and areas where future research can expand on the subject of racism. The researcher also provided points of interest in the appendix that explains the processes, pseudonyms, timelines, and other strategies used in this study.

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Research that helps to frame African American experiences with racism issues is a part of the historical content in the stories, policy, and laws that challenge African American normal existence. The inescapable issues of inequality for African Americans since WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam, The Gulf War, Post 9/11, and Iraqi Freedom, to the present bind African Americans perception of equality in perpetual forms of racism. Each timeframe in history presents similar themes of the African American experience in terms of inequality and racism. This research adds understanding to American perception and views on institutional and systemic racism in organizations and institutions.

Before the enlisted soldier's enlistment, African Americans have faced the social-political confinements associated with marginalization in education, housing, jobs, access to public resources, politics, and justice. Bonilla-Silva (1997) describes this assumption as racialized social systems. Bonilla –Silva (1997) reported that the historical facts are present to place a frame and theory around racism, but that scholarship is reluctant to allow racism to move past mere notions.

There are few qualitative studies on institutional or systemic racism as an issue in the U.S. Army (Downing, 2012; Loggins, 2016; Mencke, 2010). A narrative inquiry using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the conceptual framework is an appropriate way to approach and understand how African Americans perceive race and racism in the military

from their experiences lived before military service. CRT considers the history of lived experiences when constructing the narratives that explain marginalized group's accounts of their reality. Maxwell (2013) explains that constructing a qualitative study often requires a bricolage or "do it yourself approach" by bringing the pieces that create a mosaic of information. Therefore, the literature needed to conduct the research comes from historical accounts, recent dissertations on racism, implicit bias, institutional and systemic racism from past and present scholarship.

This approach to the research provides the opportunity for a multitude of significant scholarly sources to provide insight into the phenomenon. That being the case, this literature review does not explore every nuance of literature cited. Rather, the research provides the constructed scholarly evidence from noted scholarship that provides validity to the arguments. Likewise, there are volumes of laws and historical events that could expand this research beyond what is important to fill the gap in research. The literature review in this research serves the purpose as historical artifacts in the absence of empirical research and as bench markers for further research.

The social, political, educational, and economic values of the everyday life of an African American who enters the military intersects with U.S. Army core values and the progressive evolving military stance to address racism (Burgin, 2015). African American soldiers have always had to struggle with systemic and institutional racism even though federal law and military policies are in place to prevent such devaluing of citizenship in the U.S. and the U.S. Army (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Ellison, 1992; Moskos & Butler 1996; Webb & Herrmann, 2002). The institutional racism that has now become structural racism derived from the condition of slavery that African Americans endured

for hundreds of years. Even when the U.S. made slavery unconstitutional, Whites constructed Jim Crow laws that bound African Americans in servitude and a system of marginalization in the major institutions that could promote equality (Anderson, 2016).

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) suggest that systemic racism is a normal complement to the perceptions of the African American narrative. Burgin, (2015) demonstrates that from 1960-1970 systemic racism touched every enlisted soldier in some capacity and that the fear of African American militancy drove the U.S. military White leadership to form policies to help control and prevent African Americans from a perceived racial uprising in the 1970s. Since then, there have been very few accounts of acts of racism reported by the U.S. Army.

### The African American Experience

American culture is a mosaic of immersed cultures that form layers of subcultures. According to Campbell (1996), African American culture has no definitive cultural heritage as a race similar to a race of people from Germany, Italy, or France. Most Black races emerged into the American culture as servants or slaves, where Africa was their perceived homeland. The overlooked fact by most people is that not all Africans and people of color from African share the same cultures and traditions. The connective heritage of people from different countries and villages of Africans placed in servitude in the U.S. is slavery (Campbell, 1996).

For over a century, the children of freed slaves have been fighting to move from a culture of slavery, and the subjugation under Jim Crow laws practiced in both the southern and northern states in the U.S. Throughout history, some African Americans have made tremendous strides in economic attainment. Mallach (2018) reported that as

African Americans move up in social status from 1960-1970, they began to separate between social class lines. However, segregation and racism did not miss them as they moved upward.

Today we see many African Americans in prominent positions, but it does not mean that the racism under Jim Crow and the legal federal and state law is gone (Alexander, 2010). Socialization transforms racism over time where racism becomes a fixture within the structures of political and social interests of the American culture (DiAngelo 2018; Woodson, 1933). For example, in 2017, after a white nationalist march and the murder of a counter-protester, The President of the United States said, “there are fine people on both sides” (DiAngelo, 2018).

The everyday experiences for many African Americans are a consistent reminder that they live in a society that attempts to marginalize them when in contact and social acquaintance with Whites. The African American cultural experience remains marred with years of overt racism, prejudice, and discriminatory acts (Anderson 2016; Campbell, 1996). They emerged from a system of slavery and into a country that allowed a group or race of people to become tortured and terrorized through physical violence, rape, murder, illegal incarceration, and forced assimilation (Alexander, 2010).

African Americans continue to fight through poor educational systems, discriminatory housing practices, job discrimination, and colorism or discrimination based on the complexion of the skin. Woodson (1933) posits that the African American community way to end subjugation is to merge independently into the political fabric of America (p.123). Anderson (2016) demonstrated that every attempt to strengthen the

political interest of African American comes with enormous opposition, which is consistent with Jim Crow of the past to the present.

African American service member's pre-military experiences are a product of communities of African descendants who have merged into the layers of subcultures in the U.S. Language, educational attainment, social, and political involvement are part of their communal life (Campbell 1996). Their paternal affiliation, social, political, and educational prowess form their sense of values, purpose, motivation, and direction.

Mallach (2018) and Margo (2004) agreed that African American families are important to understanding how African American service members perceive race while on active duty. Many African American traditional family structures have lagged other ethnic groups, although the typical two-parent home in America by all races is in decline (Margo, 2004). Unlike other ethnic groups, however, African Americans untraditional family structure is due to economic, social, and political discrimination factors of African American males.

African American males are more likely to be unemployed, underpaid, and incarcerated, which is part of the African American cultural narrative (Alexander, 2010). The disproportionate rate of African American males who do not graduate from college compared to the African American female is a cause for concern in the African American community (Mallach, 2018). The crisis is so extreme that many colleges and universities promote the African American Male Initiative, which is a course correction program to assist African American males in enrolling, persisting, and graduating from college.

Campbell (1996) reported that culture in the United States ranks race by social and economic power. According to Alexander (2010), the perception of African

American men is that they represent the lowest class of race. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) misused biased cognitive tests and data to lead scholars and educators to perceive African American male as intellectually inferior to other races. Anderson (2016) showed there is also a perception that since African Americans did not immigrate to America, they should not have a voice in American democracy. Educational deprivation became the tool to solidify White constructed truths about African American men and divide people of color and the White race (Alexander 2010; Woodson, 1933).

Anderson (2016) and Mallach (2018) asserted that the Civil Rights movement was a pivotal cultural moment in American history that produced a wider separation between the African American communities than anticipated. Many of the African Americans who lived in American communities not affected by the movement remained complacent. Their families moved forward while families in the south witnessed the brutal acts of torture both mentally and physically.

Some African Americans in America have settled for the status quo in many communities (Dillon, 2007; Mallach, 2018). Their generational victimization and planned discrimination created attitudes of marginal existence as the norm for some African Americans. It has created African American classism where generations of African Americans fall in the ranges of an African American class system includes first-generation college-bound families, an African American worker class, or school to prison pipeline African American class (Alexander 2010; Anderson, 2016; Terry, 1985).

Campbell (1996) demonstrated that the most socially challenged of the African American class most often depend on government programs for additional economic support. Many do not pursue formal forms of higher education past high school but do



not lack intelligence. Wetts and Willer (2018) discussed how the willingness to accept government assistance plays a role in the experiences that impacted this population of African Americans. Whites are prone to disdain any federal or welfare assistance given to African Americans. For many Whites, the perception is African Americans who partake in welfare assistance use very little effort to rise above their conditions where poverty becomes their culture and class (Wetts & Willer, 2018).

CRT provides the counter-narrative that reveals that systemic racism and discrimination through law and judicial actions continue to cripple African Americans and their families for generations. Some of the enlisted soldiers enter the U.S. Army service from these communities. They form their values and perceptions of the world through these cultural realities. The U.S. Army values grind against America's relationship between race and ethnicity. According to Terry (1985) and Ellison (1992) military members find difficulty fitting into the ideals of a racist community.

Anderson (2016) provide a comprehensive counter-narrative of the history of social, political, and economic accounts in history in her book "*White Rage*." Her narrative challenges the mainstream narratives of accounts on the effects of legislation and White privilege. Anderson (2016) supports and presents the diversity of African American thinking where it connects to the Post 9/11 soldier's perspectives and ideas of racism and nationalism. The same African American who may have fought for freedom in the streets, cities, and states of the U.S. ends up being the same African American willing to die for his or her country. Anderson (2016) provided the historical canvas of the political, social, and educational battle that the African American service member encountered before, during, and after military service through each era herein described.

## African American Enlisted Soldier's Identity

Before military service, U.S. Army enlisted soldiers' experiences are part of the American subcultures where they live. Their perceptions are a historical culmination of their community's influence on their knowledge of laws, customs, education, and behaviors. The influences that form their value system are a product of their family and communities, economics, social, political, educational, power, involvement, and acceptance (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Campbell, 1996; Loggins 2016). They describe how African Americans define their system of values. CRT challenges the misrepresented public perceptions of their experiences using the voice of the people who lived and felt the effects of their environment.

African Americans who enlisted in the U.S. Army come from diverse backgrounds divided by social, economic, political, and educational distinctions. Therefore, grouping African American soldiers into one cultural group or pathological cultural norm is not justifiable (Wong, et al., 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). The enlisted soldiers' backgrounds are all diverse and merged in the subcultures that make up America.

The U.S. Army has ten weeks to quickly blend and merge all cohorts of citizens into a subculture of the U.S. where all newly enlisted soldiers pledge to the norms of the Army's culture. Halvorson (2010) demonstrated how the U.S. Army presents the enlisted soldier with rules, traditions, and values that they adopt as their customs and courtesy around a set of core values. Racism has no function in this new merit discipline-based system where strict adoption to the U.S. Army's culture is contrary to the mainstream U.S. social stratification (Halvorson, 2010; Mencke, 2010). Success in the early stages of the

enlisted soldier's development depends on how well the individual adapts to the core values, and their willingness to conform to a team environment of diverse cultures.

McNamara (2018) stated when an enlisted person joins the military service, the U.S. Army merges them into an Army ethos driven by a values system which forms a set of norms, and customs led by Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) who provide purposes, motivation, and direction. These NCOs were once enlisted soldiers and rose to the ranks of a supervisor who carries out the orders and plans of Commissioned Officers. The NCO core is known as the backbone of the U.S. Army.

The NCO supervises most of the functions of daily work. NCOs are the first step in recognizing and recommending junior soldiers for reward and punishment along a hierarchy of authority of senior to subordinate positions of authority and responsibility. The NCOs train, evaluate, manage, supervise, and is in the enlisted soldier's direct line of supervision. Enlisted soldiers depend on the NCO and seldom interact with the commissioned officers or Senior NCO without the presence of their first line supervising NCO (Field Manual 7-22.7, 2015).

The NCO's formal and informal chain of command is a factor that most nonmilitary civilians do not understand. The informal chain of command is the standard-bearer for Army ethos and discipline, reward, and punishment. According to Field Manual 7-22.7 (2015), NCO's actions and leadership are the beacons of the enlisted soldiers' actions where the enlisted soldiers adopt many leadership traits from the NCO.

The NCO lives the Army core values where the core values are the foundation for soldier behavior and communal living. The core values of loyalty, duty, respect, integrity, selfless service, honesty, and personal courage that the U.S. Army introduces to

new soldiers of all ranks are binding beliefs that remain with soldiers in and out of service (Halvorson 2010). The NCO is the standard-bearer and the role model that help shape and interpret their values and the leader of their teams (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Moskos & Butler 1996). Any corruption in the NCO's ethos and discipline can corrupt and cripple the entire team or unit.

### *Military Service*

The process of becoming a soldier in the U.S. Army is not complete until the enlistee passes basic training. Basic Training is a cultural emersion process that takes U.S. citizens and re-shapes their thinking from a U.S. value system of individualism to a member of a team. Military culturally base its ideology on values and cooperative norms and behaviors where each service uniquely values their brand of fraternal overtones through the sharing of language, symbols, and experiences (McNamara, 2018; Moore, 2010; Moskos & Butler, 1996; Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2003). The key to the Army's brand strategy that ties service members to a uniformed organization is the Army's core values (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, 2019).

The transition from the military back into private citizenship is a process that historically has had a great impact on the enlisted soldier. Many soldiers decide to leave military service for various reasons. The reasons for leaving may be they initially entered the military for educational benefits, have medical injuries, are terminated for poor performance, or they retire (forced or willingly).

According to the *Army Career and Alumni Program: Transition Handbook*, (1992) the services for the enlisted soldier transitions are now mandatory. The process to reintegrate the soldier back into the civilian workforce should they desire assumes that

the civilian workforce is equitable and fair. Enlisted soldiers are often not mentally prepared to assimilate into the civilian workforce and often remain close to the military organizations or seek organizations who are military friendly. Those who venture away from military associations may be more likely to face discrimination and other issues during and after transitioning from the uniformed service (Athern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer, Moos, 2015).

Unit commanders and NCOs have the responsibility to allow soldiers to participate in the transition process (AR 600-81, 2016; Army Career and Alumni Program, 1992; VOW, 2011). Army policy mandates that all soldiers must begin the transition process at least a year in advance of their separation. Once in the transition process, the soldiers should have the opportunity to take advantage of all the programs that fit their goals with the support from the formal and informal chain of command. According to Margo (2004), African American enlisted soldiers have a difficult time transitioning into the workforce that their White counterparts do not experience.

Edwards (2016) found that retired enlisted do not experience the level of discrimination that many other soldiers may experience. Most retired enlisted seek work within the Veterans Administration or agencies and organization like the military. The retired enlisted retirement income and status often place them in the middle to upper-middle class. Their socialization also remains within the social and rank structures of their prior military service (Edwards 2016).

White soldiers have historically had a better transition into the educational and workforce than African Americans. After a White or African American soldier separates from the military, they must navigate their goals on their own merits (Margo, 2004).

Many soldiers find it difficult to gain access to meaningful jobs and often take jobs that are less than their knowledge, skills, and abilities. African American soldiers, however, are more likely to be unemployed and take longer to find a job than their White counterparts who separate from the military (Maloney, 1994; Margo, 2004, McNamara, 2018).

### Major Historical Patterns

Terry (1985) provided qualitative research that centered on both enlisted and officer soldiers from the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. The result of the research was a mosaic in qualitative research that captured the social, economic, political, educational, perceptions through the lived experiences before, during and after the service of 20 soldiers during the Vietnam War. The results provided a narrative of historical events that were relevant to the times of African Americans lives but untold by mainstream historical accounts. The work by Terry (1985) reported the experiences for racial tension and the delivery of equality for African Americans from the past. The research captured oral history through qualitative research about racism that goes undiscussed like so many African American historical accounts of institutional racism that could otherwise provide valuable insight for leaders and scholars.

### *WWII*

African Americans faced many challenges in the social-political landscape of America before enlistment in the U.S. Army during the WWII era. America was navigating through the Great Depression. Jim Crow laws kept African Americans in bondage. Discrimination of public resources in the New Deal welfare programs did not include African American populations equally when compared to other races. Before

enlistment in WWII, the Great Depression emerged as the social economic and political nightmare in the U.S. and was tough on most people in the U.S. The conditions of African Americans were worse than other races. Public support did not include African Americans in the same manner as Whites (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001).

Franklin D. Roosevelt issued several executive orders after the Great Depression. His New Deal ushered in a wave of federal programs to aid local citizens. These federal programs provided monetary and other support relief to many urban governments and citizens. The impact of these programs created a dependency on the federal government that continues today. One of the residual impacts of the New Deal programs is the misguided and misdirected face of the recipients who benefit from the assistance (Wetts and Willer, 2018).

Brooks and Manza (2007) presented the perceptions of welfare surrounding the Great Depression. Blumer (1958) and Bobo (1999) disclosed how Whites resent African American's achievement when Whites perceive a threat to their hierarchy. Gilens (1999) furthered that argument that racism is present because of the perception that African Americans would gain from welfare assistance. Shifts in minority status to gain political power through social trends and African American achievement would challenge dominant groups. The conversation from Neubeck & Cazenave (2001) and Gilens (1999) summarized the narrative that supported the research of Wetts and Willer (2018) that there is a significant perception that many Whites' are inclined to hold prejudiced attitudes towards African Americans regarding welfare.

The New Deal did not end the depression as many scholars and researchers have noted nor did it end racism and subjugation of minorities and the poor in the urban

landscape. It did awaken the nation's eyes and the world's view on segregation.

According to Woolner (2010), the New Deal era took unprecedented steps toward social unrest. Many officials joined the cause of inclusion in the cities; however, there were just as many who disdained the ideas that allowed minorities an upward mobility existence and experience in the U.S., especially in the southern states (Anderson, 2016).

#### *During the service*

After legal pressure allowed African Americans to enlist in the U.S. Army, the deal was to maintain segregation at all cost despite federal laws that suggested otherwise. In 1941, President Theodore Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802. This Executive Order made racial discrimination a punishable offense in the national defense industry. President Harry S. Truman followed that order with Executive Order 9982 that ended segregation in the military. African American U.S. Army enlisted, and officers did not benefit from this legislation for over 25 years. McGuire (1983) reported in actual letters from African American soldiers that demonstrated how the Jim Crow laws outweighed military regulations. White officers were reluctant to assist or intervene with terrorism and exploitation of African American U.S. Army soldiers that went against the local authority. The position of the Army's general staff was evident:

Every effort should be made by the War Department to maintain in the Army the social and racial conditions which exist in civil life in order that the normal customs of white and colored personnel now in the Army may not be suddenly disrupted. The Army can, under no circumstance, adopt a policy which is contrary to the dictates of a majority of the people (McGuire 1983, p.5).



That statement by Army leadership set the tone for over 25 years of oppressive conditions for African Americans in the military as the intersection of social, educational, political, and economic conditions of the U.S. played a part in the perceptions of systemic racism in the U.S. Army.

### *After Military Service*

Transitioning from the military was a different experience for African Americans in comparison to White enlisted. Their experiences returned them to the communities that they had left, which did not change socially, politically, or economically.

Educational aspirations were in view, but that aspiration was unequal.

Before the military, education for African Americans was primarily attainable through African American colleges. By serving in the military, the African American soldier earned economic access to colleges and universities through the G.I. Bill. "It has, in particular, been described as "the most revolutionary. . . piece of legislation to affect American higher education in the 20th century" (Wilson, 2017, p. 32) and as the policy that "democratized higher education in the United States." The G.I. Bill policy was an opportunity for African Americans to close the gap in education despite the efforts to discourage African Americans equal access to the benefits that the G.I. Bill offered such as education, skills training, small business loans, unemployment benefits, and home loans.

Turner and Bound (2002) presented empirical evidence that the Serviceman's Readjustment Act (Public Law 346, 1944), (G.I. Bill) for veterans returning from WWII to the southern United States was markedly different between African American and White veterans returning to the northern states in the United States. Segregation

restricted African American veterans from using the benefits of the G.I. Bill that resulted in fewer opportunities for African Americans for educational attainment. A by-product of the social construction of segregation, the economic and class gap continued to widen between Whites and African Americans. Maloney (1994) posited that the educational counseling service to assist returning veterans with educational assistance to use their G.I. Bill discriminated against African Americans, especially in the southern states.

The influx of veterans returning to the south from the service seeking higher education overwhelmed many of the Black colleges. The Second Morrill Act of 1890 supported Black colleges receipt of federal funds for education. However, the Black colleges' resources and accommodations struggled to support many African Americans looking to attend college (Jolly, 2013; Maloney, 1994).

#### *Korean War*

Allen and Farley (1986) stated the African American community in the 1950s experienced extreme forms of racism despite the rise in middle-class attainment for African Americans. African Americans' social, political, economic, and educational status lagged behind all other races. In 1954, the Supreme Court declared segregation in public school's illegal in the landmark case *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*. Housing discrimination practices were in place through restrictive redlining areas to discourage African Americans from certain areas (Anderson, 2016; Mallach 2018). Anderson (2016) offered research that demonstrated how voting discrimination and intimidation was the normal practice used to maintain the political interest of the elite classes. Bowers, Hammond, and MacGarrigle (1996) pointed out that well before

integration, the U.S. Army was on the move toward integration in the workforce before the rest of the U.S.

Pope (2017) presented a dissertation that pointed out the lack of literature on the social and political conditions of African Americans during the Korean War. Most of the literature focused on the battlefield experiences and the level of training captured with units like the 24th Infantry Regiment. The stories were left to wither away where many Americans never heard these stories that help shape America and secure its freedoms.

Bowers et al. (1996) described the conditions under which the 24th Infantry Regiment, an all-African American unit fought, and the segregation that they faced in the U.S. Bowers et al. (1996) reported that the social injustice in social life in the U.S. crept its way into the military ranks and affected the already degraded training on the entire Army. The poor performance of this unit presents a distorted image of African American performance during this period. Historians centered their credibility on this single unit and left out the voice and actions of other African American units and individuals who were successful (Pope, 2017). Without the accounts from the letters presented by McGuire, (1983), the mainstream narrative would maintain that African Americans were inferior and militarily unreliable and in need of White supervision.

Disparities at the polls were effective in denying African Americans the right to vote and disenfranchising through poll taxes. Cultural stereotypes in the media of all forms played a role in racist ideologies during this period of U.S. history that discriminated against African Americans. African Americans spent their entire youth in a society that presented social dominance through White superiority and unfair and often brutal voting practices against African Americans. Anderson (2016) demonstrated the

tactics that Whites used to secure their interest through legally barring African Americans from political participation in some states and cities.

### *The Vietnam War*

After the Korean War, the U.S. was in the beginning stages of the civil rights movement or Rights Revolution. The southern states were the battleground of protest, lynching, terroristic intimidation, and acts of extreme violence documented and undocumented against African Americans and their White supporters by Whites (Anderson, 2016; Terry 1985). Segregation and social-political issues during the 1950s and 1960s were an uneasy time for African Americans.

African Americans enlisting in the armed forces or those drafted into the Vietnam War brought with them many of the issues that affected them in their communities. Terry (1985) presented research that was to become the book *“Bloods; Black veterans of the Vietnam War”*. The book preserves the experience of African Americans during the Vietnam War before, during, and after serving in the military. The oral accounts of the soldiers’ experiences counter mainstream accounts of African Americans in the Vietnam War and add to the mainstream narrative of American history by not eliminating or devaluing the African American experience.

Terry (1985) interviewed 20 African American members of the armed forces as they entered, served, and transitioned from the military service. The stories detailed the common theme of social, educational, political, and economic struggles that challenged their reality. Racism did not escape any of the constructs and showed that structural and institutional racism was a normal part of their day. Individual racism was not an issue.

The author centered the accounts of the soldier's experiences where the policy of the military and the country failed to provide equality to the liberties of African Americans. The themes from WWII and the Korean War resurfaced in that institutional racism kept the status of White privilege and power with less opportunity for African Americans to move forward in America. The differences were that the entire world had their eyes on America's southern state's brutalization of African Americans. The world witnessed how Whites used local policing and Jim Crow to torture African Americans who resisted any form of discrimination.

Graham (2003) revealed how African Americans experienced institutional racism in the military during the Vietnam War. Many Whites used education as drafting practice to escape the draft. African Americans were more often on the front lines and in combat units than White soldiers (Terry, 1985). The standard practices created the conditions that assured that African Americans served in combat roles. By doing so, African American work force skills were less transferable while White middle-class college-educated citizens received the technical skills for upward mobility (Fendrich, 1972).

### *Transitioning*

African American soldiers returning from Vietnam faced the problems of discrimination and a heightened social consciousness from the African American communities. Even so, the military took more steps towards integration than any other organization in the United States. The process of social change was slow, but Vietnam presented a different social issue than WWII and Korea in terms of segregation. However, racial tensions remained stronger than ever. The question that Fendrich (1972) asserted is whether African Americans who were returning from the military would have

upward mobility or return as second-class citizens? “Problems are described as the transition from “democracy’ in the foxhole to discrimination in the ghetto at home” (Fendrich, 1972 p. 60-75).

The issue in transitioning was that African Americans had several sides to choose that was dependent on the communities they decided to return to after military service. In some cases, packing up to move to less stressful conditions was not easy. Moore (2010) presented cases in New Orleans from WWII to the presence of police brutality. Police in New Orleans created conditions of intimidation that corralled African American communities into submission where their rights as citizens were absent. Singler (2011) pointed out that in Seattle, Washington growth of the African American communities resulted in Whites turning on their once easygoing African Americans, resulting in Black Power movements. (Anderson, 2016) pointed to Bloody Sunday, the murders in Selma of civil rights workers as an example of many issues that the African American enlisted soldier experienced in their communities before, during, and after the Vietnam era.

After Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans in the 1970s continued to face challenges in equal access and opportunities. Some progress did occur in jobs and housing; however, the issues of redlining, segregated schools, busing, and redistricting remained problematic. Anderson (2016) discussed how voting rights between 1957-1970, as a battleground in law over the Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act of 1964. Despite the law being in place, institutions in the U.S. remain anti-black and slowed progress for African American communities to prosper.

### *Post-Vietnam through Iraq to the present*

From 1973-2001, the United States only dealt with military operations and not full-scale wars. During this period and up to the War in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (War in Iraq) soldiers enlisting in the military and African Americans growing up in America witnessed slow progress and improvements of equality in the lives of African Americans (Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985). The road to get there was not smooth, however. After Vietnam, the U.S. had to deal with the aftermath of the national crisis and the psychological effect of soldiers returning from Vietnam.

Even after segregation, White flight from schools and neighborhoods were common. African American economic futures did improve up to 1979, but the gap between African American and White incomes, jobs, and social positions reverted to levels seen during WWII and the Vietnam era. Research by Quillian, Pager, Hexel, and Midtoen (2017) and Margo (2004) showed that despite improvements in inclusion, African Americans' wealth, unemployment, and gaps in unemployment did not improve but widened during this era. Implicit bias, microaggressions, and covert acts of racism increased. Institutional and structural racism became the norm that replaced acts of violence.

Ahern et al. (2015) wrote an article that explained that soldiers returning from military service had difficulty transitioning back into the civilian world and experienced high concentrations of substance abuse and family issues. The same observation was true both after Vietnam tours of duty and Afghanistan/Iraq Wars. Veterans continued through the Post-Vietnam era to the present to have issues with receiving mental and physical health care and securing jobs (Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Margo 2004).

Many current scholars and authors captured the experience and the historical perspectives of the current conditions of African American life in the U.S. (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 2016; Desmond, 2016; Leovy, 2015; Solomon & Rankin, 2019). Some African Americans lived in middle and upper-middle-class lifestyles while others came from a poor working class. Nonetheless, their experiences came from the environments where they lived. In the military, soldiers may have experienced changes in equal opportunity. The Army values along with merit, skills, and abilities of individuals, made discrimination against African Americans while in the military less of an issue (Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010).

Mallach (2018), Alexander (2010), Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2007) showed that disparities in housing, jobs, hiring practices, education, and incarceration through structural and institutional racism shifted from being overt to covert practices. White Americans resisted U.S. policies that helped African Americans move forward to inequality in organizations (Bobo, 1999).

Soldiers who transitioned from the military had issues in demonstrating how their skills transferred into the skillsets that civilian human resource practitioners and recruiters recognized (Davis & Minnis, 2016; Rose, Herd, Palacio, 2016). The issue resided in the perceptions of the civilian workforce to see beyond the combat skills that society brands on all soldiers. Enlisted soldiers' jobs in the military are compatible with the day-to-day workforce jobs in the U.S. (Davis & Minnis, 2016). "The military trains you to be technically proficient in whatever occupation. However, a person will also learn teamwork, perseverance, leadership, and other skills widely applicable in the civilian workforce" (Dillon, 2007 p. 8).



In 1992, all African Americans living and those born after 1992 understood the decision of the beating of Rodney King. That single event revealed the horrors that the U.S. was hiding in plain sight but due to social media the story became nonfictional. According to Margo (2004), events like the Rodney King incident, along with other race-related riots, are the triggers that devalue the housing and social-economics in the areas where African Americans live. The occurrences of these riots hurts jobs and income in the African American communities.

African Americans complained of terror in their neighborhoods and episodes of prejudice and discrimination that Whites overlooked for decades. The research to capture the accounts was important, and now through social media there is evidence that these types of racism are realities for many African Americans (Bobo, Charles, Krysan, & Simmons, 2012). Now social media and technology can visually and audibly capture acts in a manner that surveys could not. People all over the world have immediate access to the crippling of the African American social status firsthand.

Levoy (2015) and Moore (2010) provided the portrait of the second migration after Hurricane Katrina of the treatment of African Americans in public policy practices through police brutality and racial profiling. Housing discriminatory practices corralled African Americans into socially controlled communities politically and economically. White flight and zoning created desperate educational conditions. Desmond (2016) described the conditions in housing in the north and the treatment of poor African Americans. The same conditions remained for some African Americans, as they existed since WWII. Alexander (2010) and Anderson (2016) pointed out how the political interest of White communities serves to promote White interest over the African

American community. Lastly, Solomon and Rankin (2019) joined the conversation with the perspective of the current generation of Blackness that demonstrates the coping strategies and forward thinking of the current generation. Moreover, African American enlisted soldiers are present, and the conditions of their community may have some influence on their perceptions, both in and out of the military.

Bonilla-Silva (2015) and Gonino (2017) agreed that many Americans took the position that the election of an African American President of the United States removed the obstacle of racism from the African American community. The position of scholars is that many White Americans take a firm position that hard work is the key for African Americans to advance like Obama. For example, Wilson (2017) pointed out that from 1971 to 2010 elite law schools witnessed increased enrollments of African American students, but White elite law firms showed no increase of African American lawyers added to the elite law firms. Admission to elite colleges does not mean the students have the talents that the elite law firm requires for employment.

### *Conclusion*

American culture is a mosaic of immersed cultures with layers of subcultures but dictated by the interests of White Americans. African American culture is a complex derivative culture rooted in slavery that stems from numerous villages, tribes, and countries from Africa, the Caribbean Islands, and Native Americans. The everyday experiences for many African Americans is a consistent reminder that they live in a society that attempts to marginalize them as unequal and distinguish them as other than American. Other minority groups with distinct features may share similar sentiment, regarding their experiences with cultural acceptance in America. While many African

Americans have moved into a middle-class and upper-class social-economic status, they often are reminded by some form of injustice that America may still have an issue with the color of their skin or the placement of them within a system of class and status.

Halvorson (2010) showed that African Americans who enlisted in the U.S. Army come from diverse backgrounds with divisions in social, economic, political, and educational distinctions. Their perceptions are a historical culmination of their community's influence on their knowledge of laws, customs, education, and behaviors. Basic Training is a cultural immersion process that takes U.S. citizens and re-shapes their thinking from a U.S. value system of individualism to a member of a merit-based team built on a set of core values. The U.S. Army has ten weeks to quickly blend and merge all the members into a subculture of the U.S., where the newly enlisted soldier pledges to the norms of the Army's culture. The team concept and Army's core values remain a fundamental ideology during the service and often past their transition from their military service (Halvorson, 2010).

There are periods in American history that shaped the argument that institutional and systemic racism have been the hallmark that may shape the enlisted soldier's perception of racism. The conditions that shape their perceptions before, during, and after military are consistent tenets in each major period in American history. Beginning with WWII and up to post Afghanistan and Iraqi Wars, the history of U.S. policy, laws, and everyday experiences that African Americans face may challenge the enlisted soldier's ideology on liberty and opportunity. Those soldiers able to achieve relative success based solely on their merit may find difficulty with the idea of institutional and systemic racism.

### Chapter III

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

A narrative methodology was used to understand the perceptions of the recently separated enlisted soldier's experience of racism. The voices and stories of the African American enlisted soldier were a critical part of that understanding. Latino, Asian, Women, Muslim, and other minorities have similar accounts and perceptions. The focus of this study was with African Americans. Using other minorities to understand their unique voice may offer opportunities for additional research.

The research questions have a relationship with the tenets of CRT. Kim (2016), Merriam (2002) and Patton (2000) all agree that qualitative narrative inquiry is a preferred research method to capture the data needed for CRT research where the voice is the essence of the inquiry. Marginalized people can better articulate their experience based on their personal experiences.

Other qualitative approaches like portraiture, heuristic, and ethnographical methods are equally suitable but would not capture the scholarly inquiry needed from the research. Portraiture, for example, is a very suitable choice but would require a deeper emersion into the lives of the participants. Timing and coordination are factors that the participants nor the researcher could overcome. Heuristic designs and methods are rigorous and rooted in psychotherapy and physiological counseling. That type of study was not ideal due to the researcher's background. An ethnographical method was

plausible, but that type of research is rooted in anthropology where years of emerged fieldwork by the researcher are necessary. The researcher's extensive years of military service satisfied the emersion requirements, and an autobiographical study would produce a generalized understanding of the research questions. The interest rests with the enlisted population of participants, and therefore, the researcher deferred experiences to biographical narratives of recently separated enlisted soldier's experiences.

The narratives produced the accounts or counter stories of the participant's experience. In qualitative research, the narrative blends a single person or small group of individuals and re-stories their experience in a single thematically literary overture. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the process of in and out. The process linked stories in a logical sequence that had a beginning, middle, and end. It also provided the social, educational, cultural, and political intersects that combined their experiences into a uniform and historical context. The result was a comprehensive discovery and re-discovery of relevant causes that the participants' combined experiences can explain through codeweaving and characterizing the emerged voices of the participants (Kim, 2016; Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Saldaña, 2016).

There are some challenges that come with the narrative approach. The sample size and generalization of the outcome is an issue for the larger body of research that addresses research from the quantitative lens. Another challenge is reflexivity or convincing others that the re-story is not the researcher's story. In addition, challenges arise when the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, which can produce biases that challenges the participant's voice. Collecting and analyzing the stories while eliminating the researcher's bias needed to follow strict protocols to maintain validity.

Last, is the process of producing the understanding of an expectable theoretical frame that is believable and comprehensible to the reader.

The research began with questions that helped to answer the research inquiry.

RQ 1. How did eight recently separated African American U.S. Army service members perceive race prior to military service?

RQ 2. What factors may have influenced the recently separated U.S. Army service member's perception of race while on active duty?

RQ 3. How did the recently separated U.S. Army service members make sense of acts of racism after serving in the military?

RQ 4. How did the U.S. Army's core values shape your understanding of Racism after military service?

The Army's core values of (loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage) support essentialism and intersectional views of the mainstream narratives in the U.S. culture by all races. The U.S. Army soldiers are accountable to these values in all aspects of their daily life while on active duty and often become an assimilated personal value.

### Population and Sample

The researcher used Seidman's (2013) three 90-minute interview protocol, which produced rich and thick narratives of data needed for a study (Maxwell 2013; Patton, 2002). The research questions kept the focus of the study on the participant's experiences with racism. The protocols began with the selection of the participants, the data collection process, analyzing the data, and presenting the results.

### *Sample Size*

The researcher selected as many participants needed to produce saturation of the data. Patton (2002) recommends that the purpose and goals determine the sample size of the study. (Merriam, 2002) suggests that the sample size and data that is rich and thick is enough when you have redundancy and saturation from the information that the sample produces. Maxwell (2013) suggests, “it depends” (p. 87).

### *Accessible Participants*

One of the reliability threats in qualitative research is the ability to duplicate the study (Kim, 2016). Recently separated veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill or Vocational Rehabilitative educational benefits provided a purposeful group found at most colleges and universities. The accessible participants were former U.S. Army service members who had separated from the military and have completed no less than 180-days of military service, which is a requirement to receive benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This population provided a purposeful group to use that is widely available but unique. It also gives researchers and readers who wish to duplicate or use the study points of reference to follow.

Atlanta Metropolitan State College (AMSC) is a 4-year state access college located in the footprint of downtown Atlanta, Georgia. AMSC’s campus was 95% African American at the time of the study. The military population was 110 military veterans at the time of the research. The age of the recently separated veteran is between 22 to 39 years of age. There is no campus housing; therefore, all students live off-campus and commute to campus using various modes of transportation. Many of the students supplement their full and part-time employment with the GI Bill stipends.

The character of their service was honorable, general (under honorable conditions), or medically discharge related. These service members live in Atlanta, Georgia and the Atlanta Metropolitan area and attend AMSC. Atlanta, Georgia, and AMSC are part of an urban locale that is representative of many large metropolitan cities in the U.S. where African Americans live, work, and attend local institutions of higher learning.

### *Selection Procedures*

The study used a purposeful and homogeneous sampling. Purposeful sampling is a direct selection based on the researcher's judgment and homogeneous sampling groups the participants to specifically similar traits (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 1990). The sample were veterans who have served in the U.S. Army, National Guard, or U.S. Army Reserves, using the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, or Vocational Rehabilitation educational entitlements. The group was part of a team and were familiar with the Army Core Values. The selection process ensured that the samples in the population had a normal enlistment that did not include major disciplinary actions such as Field Grade Article 15.

The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) is the primary portal for students using military-related educational benefits. The VRC receives over 10 visits per day by veteran affiliated students. Invitations to the veterans' groups through email went out after gaining access through the IRB process. The invitations were generic to protect the students who initially volunteered to participate. The researcher also used direct contact with veteran student visitors to the VRC. Through this process eight participants came forward who met the qualifications. These eight participants provided the saturation and



redundancy needed for a rich study. As long as saturation and redundancy occurs, a qualitative research design can maintain rigor and validity (Kim, 2016).

## Data Collection

### *Collection Method*

The study used three 90-minute open-ended interviews recommended by Seidman (2013) to gain a deep understanding of eight enlisted service member's experiences with racism. The research questions along with guiding questions helped to keep the conversation directed and to center their experiences on racism issues. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that the strength of CRT studies is to get to the core of race and racism; it should be up front. The guiding questions helped the participants to not digress too far from their re-story where racism was the primary focus. A list of the guiding questions are in Appendix A.

The first interview focused on the participant's life story. During the first interview, the goal was to capture their story but also to allow the participants to gain confidence and comfort. Participants may feel reluctant in the first interview to freely talk. The researcher's extensive time in the U.S. Army provided the advantage to create conversation and dialog that was familiar to the participants and helped to relieve anxiety and stress. The questions acted as guides and the participants talked freely without interruption. That allowed their re-stories to remain the focus of the interview.

The second interview focused on reconstructing the participant's story. The goal was to concentrate on the details of their re-stories. Questions about racism led the conversation and the questions directed their conversations to critical points in their life

such as home life, educational experiences, neighborhood, promotions, marriages, deployments, post-deployment, and transitions.

The third interview focused on reflections of their re-story and clarified any points that seemed ambiguous during the first two interviews. During this interview, the questions about the participants meaning of themes that stood out during the previous interviews were important. That allowed their story to move from what they perceived about racism before military service to their current situations after serving in the U.S. Army.

The researcher used a Microsoft Surface Pro computer with Otter Voice Meeting Notes, a downloaded interpreting software to audio-record the interviews. The research used MAXQDA to code the data using Saldaña (2016) suggested coding methods. The use of memos to capture the nonverbal communication and gestures was also important. The Surface Pro also allows security of the data using multi-layered encrypted protocols.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Three 90-minute interviews provided this research with deep and rich understanding of the perceptions of the participants. The interviews did not extend the research beyond that time so as to not inconvenience the participants. The eight participants provided the amount of data needed for a rich study (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). The step-by-step data analysis process used for this study was:

1. The researcher conducted three 90-minute interviews using Seidman (2013) three-interview methods. Before this meeting, the researcher bracketed any influence through a reflective memo of the researcher's thoughts and bias.

2. The researcher audio-recorded the interview using Otter Voice Meeting Notes, which has password security, and then transcribed each interview from Otter on to a Microsoft Pro tablet.
3. The researcher then transferred the data to MAXQDA to code the transcriptions.
4. Pre-coded the information by creating anchor coding to organize the information using Narrative Coding process described in Saldaña (2016).
5. The first cycle coding focused on the social content of the participant's voice and the values they place on the data by sorting the data and placing them with the anchor codes.
6. Next the researcher moved to the after the first cycle coding using Patterson (2008) six-part Labovian model. This coding reconstructs the narratives into stories that had a beginning middle and end. An example for this process is in Appendix B.
7. Next the research used the After Second Cycle Coding and pre-writing phase of the findings using the 'top 10' list outlined in (Saldaña, 2016).
8. Last was the process to finalize the data by reflecting on my analytical memos, providing background information of the participants, presenting my coding process and strategies, and systematically present the findings into mini stories.

The initial round of data included analytical memos that reduced this researcher's bias by bracketing personal influences. The first-round codes produced codes that were placed in categories that fit into the CRT tenets under social, political, economic, and

educational experiences. The researcher then recoded the first-round categories using narrative coding. Narrative coding produced blocks of stories that had a beginning, middle, and end.

Sorting and synthesizing the data occur during the second round of coding. During this round of coding, the researcher applied the Labovian model posited by Patterson (2008). Using the model helped distinguish the motifs and connect the dots that Saldaña (2016) discusses as important in analyzing qualitative data. The Labovian model helped to further re-shape the participant's experiences into mini stories where themes took a significant relationship when their voices were combined. According to Patterson (2008) the Labovian model theorized by William Labov, provides structure to language and the uniqueness of African American Vernacular as it should stand as its own formal language. The goal then was to finalize the interpreted codes into meaning followed by preparing and presenting the findings.

The researcher ensured that the procedures provided deep understanding by providing the background of the participants so that their voice came forth. The research did not use the participant's name or any directly identifiable personal information. Appendix C has a list of the pseudonym used in the study. Last, the researcher presented the findings according to the theme, its meaning, and the evidence for the data.

### *Validity*

There are several issues with the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research. The research questions and purpose of this research required crystallizing the data through reflexivity, member check, and peer review through the literature. Merriam (2002) describes the process of ensuring that internal validity in qualitative research is

not a process that is templated and easily constructed. The experiences are a reality that the participants construct. “In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s interpretations or understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2002, p.24).

Maxwell (2013) recommends using memos to address reflexivity and the subjective I issue throughout qualitative research. The identity memo and memos throughout the process allowed the researcher’s voice in the process without influencing the research. The researcher created memos of personal thoughts during the interview and coding process using MAXQDA. MAXQDA has features that allowed the placement of memos along with coding at the place where the thought occurs.

To address participant bias, Merriam (2002) suggest member checking. The researcher ensured that the participants clarified statements or ambiguous observations. The research instrument helped with generalization of information of the participants and military culture and terminology.

The researcher’s experience in the military helped to reduce participant’s bias. The participants understood the nature of the study and the researcher’s role. As a former senior leader, they demonstrated respect, trust, and security of their information due to linking the researcher’s status as the Veterans Director at the research site.

To reduce the threats of researcher error, each of the interviews occurred at reasonable times and was spread out over a week. It took eight weeks to collect the data from the participants. All participants lived off-campus and several had families and jobs. Spreading the time for the interviews helped the researcher organize the data and manage the research schedules. Last, the researcher conducted no more than two

interviews per day, Monday through Friday, to control internal validity. A detailed schedule of the participant interviews is listed in Appendix D.

Another strategy to address internal validity was using Otter Voice Meeting Notes to both record and transcribe the verbatim account of the participants' stories. Otter is a speech to text transcript service that has a 90-95% accuracy rating, used widely by public news agencies, media, and universities. Otter is a downloadable phone or computer app that produced transcripts along with recordings that easily transferred into MAXQDA.

The literature review also accounted for some of the descriptive validity threats. The historical accounts and events allowed the framing of their stories that shaped the construction of their experiences. For the interpretive validity, including the participants' feedback after the researcher summarized the interview by allowing them to clear up any misinterpreted accounts of their story. That process was the purpose for interview three.

There are no prescribed concrete steps for analyzing data in narrative research (Kim, 2016; Merriam 2013; Patton, 2000). Saldaña (2016) list the types of coding methods that help address scholarly threats to theoretical validity. Multiple coding methods are useful to ensure that the conclusions are accurate and consistent. Before the researcher moved to the second interview, the first interview coding process started. Once In Vivo coding was completed for the first round of coding, narrative coding followed. That process repeated for the first-round coding and transcended to second-round using the Labovian coding model. Saldaña (2016) points out that second cycle coding depends on the type of research. In this case the Labovian model was necessary.

### *Research Questions*

The following questions helped to understand how enlisted soldiers perceive racism:

RQ 1. How did eight recently separated African American U.S. Army service members perceive race prior to military service? This question formed a base of the participant's experiences that they constructed as reality before their military service.

RQ 2. What factors may have influenced the recently separated U.S. Army service member's perception of racism while on active duty? This question provided the accounts of the participant's experiences and interactions, while on active duty and allowed themes to emerge that challenged their previous experiences, Army Core Values, and other conflicting behaviors.

RQ 3. How did the recently separated U.S. Army service members make sense of acts of racism after serving in the military? The question created a point of resolution for the participants to evaluate who they are and what they believe about race after being in an environment where race should be a non-factor.

RQ4. How did the U.S. Army's core values shape the participants understanding of racism while on active duty and after military service? Albeit that this question could fit as a sub-question, the question stood as a core question because it challenged the culture of the U.S., organizations, and family.

The Army's core values of (loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage) support essentialism and intersectional views of the mainstream narrative stereotypes in the U.S. culture by all races. The U.S. Army soldiers

are accountable to these values in all aspects of their daily life while on active duty and often become an assimilated personal value.

### *Ethical Issues*

The researcher's position as the Student Conduct and Veterans Affairs Officer on campus provided no academic, personal, or professional advantage to any of the participants. The researcher had no employment affiliation with The Department of Defense and Department of Veteran's Affairs. The participants' matriculation for academic success was not a factor in the researcher's position at the college. Therefore, there were no ethical issues that could emerge from the researcher's position. Even after this research any letter of recommendations that the researcher may write will continue to follow the protocols of professional courtesy. No participant had a conduct issue, and therefore the researcher did not need to make any appropriate decisions and recommendations based on articles of facts based on my position in the campus judicial process. The results of the research focused solely on this research. Participants had the opportunity to terminate their participation at any time if they perceived that the privacy of their statements was not safe.

### *Personal Identity*

Talking to friends, colleagues, and scholars, I have discovered that many do not understand the true history of the racism issues in the U.S. and how institutional, structural, and macroaggressions forms of racism drive and affect our everyday experiences. According to Anderson (2016) the educational system, voters' rights, the gaps in wealth, jobs, and incomes between African American and Whites are examples of the effects of structural and institutional racism. Our current state, as a nation, is not



moving past generations of inequality where division is an epidemic as we see acts of racism unfold before our very eyes. The social media and age of technology changed the narratives of history through convenient access to information. The evolution of social media allows people to capture firsthand accounts of deplorable acts of human cruelty and gross violations of laws, and policies no matter who commits the crime.

The Race and Culture in Education class that I took in the summer 2019 has deepened my understanding of systemic racism in the American educational system and as an African American. The researcher's learning exploration was full of discovery and a re-enforcement of my personal experiences on race and culture. I was able to conceptualize those experiences by reading books, articles, face-to-face lectures, and peer discussions. This journey helped to form a foundation for future research and inquiry about my perceptions surrounding racism, race, and culture and to help others who find it difficult to address these issues at work or the classroom. My thoughts and perceptions evolved as I assimilated a better scholarly understanding of how other peer-scholars viewed topics on race and culture that included systemic racism, acts of racism, African American English Vernacular, deficit thinking, critical race theory, and historical truths in the African American narrative of being other than White in America.

Race and Culture in Education has allowed me to explore areas of social behavior that most people in organizations avoid. The literature on racism which includes books on critical race theories, deficient thinking models, articles, publications, and the lived experiences of class peers, family, and friends, brings forward the awareness that racism impact every sector of society from success stories of inclusion to horrific accounts of

blatant cruelty. The truths that rest within the accounts of people of all racial backgrounds are testaments that America needs to have a candid discussion about racism.

My focus area in the program is organizational leadership based on my military background and recent transition into the higher education profession. Before that course, I was tossing around ideas for my dissertation. I entered the course with an idea to focus my dissertation on military transformation to the workforce. From that course, I discovered a topic that sparked interest in leadership that many people are afraid to tackle, including myself before that class.

Discussing racism to this point, from my experience, was that racism was a tabooed subject in public discourse. I walked away with an understanding of the value of discussing racism and culture. More importantly, the discussion of racism with other scholars introduced important references that helped as a guide to discover truths and misinformation about racism in the United States. I was able to challenge my own experiences which led me to an interesting dissertation topic that has limited research, and I understand now why that is the case having taken that course on race and culture.

My experiences about the appropriateness of discussing racism were tabooed, dictated, corralled, and shelved in one way or another my entire life. Growing up and attending high school from 1980 to 1984, my public high school education in South Florida was a critical developmental point in my life. The reality and environment that I experienced was a mosaic of poverty to middle-class friends and neighbors. Police harassment, drugs, and the high school to prison pipeline were a normal progression.

Growing up in South Florida as a teen in 1980-1984 was a challenge. Dealing with the Reagan domestic federal program reductions and the G.H. Bush war on drugs

was a problem for most people that I knew. People I grew up with most of my life fit into one or more profiles that included being on drugs, involved in a crime, died as a victim of a violent crime, in jail, recently released from jail, in college, or dropped out of college and was a statistic in the previously mentioned. A few found work at the minimum levels and went on with the circle of poverty. Many of the families lived at or slightly above the poverty level. For example, being a postal worker in Fort Lauderdale who made \$15.00 per hour was an achievement. This was my reality where I did not associate or could relate with anyone outside of my reality. This was the norm.

Most communities and families did not discuss racism or factual historical frames of African American culture. You looked around your neighborhood, and that is what it was, all African American. Any discussions in schools about African American issues and history were not appropriate until January and February. Afterward, we returned to learning American history.

In my home, my father installed a revolving door for himself until I was 13, where that would be the last time that I ever saw him. My mother never discussed her working conditions, employers, or co-workers. She went from scrubbing floors and cleaning houses for \$20 a day for the people who lived in the elite neighborhoods along the beaches in Fort Lauderdale, Florida to assembly work in a factory and eventually landing a job in the Post Office after I graduated. My other three brothers and sister had moved on and were no longer in the house. My younger brother, the fifth of five boys, was serving time in juvenile detention and became trapped in the school to prison pipeline until he was 28.

My father read books every day, was an engineer, and a mechanic. He never had an issue getting a job, but drugs, alcohol, and women were his callings, and he was a professional at it. He flat out did not care for White people. In the 13 years where he was present, I never heard him say any good things regarding other races. When I entered the ninth grade would be the last time that I ever saw him again.

My years in K-12 were a confusing time. Most of my classes were with the White advanced placement students. Discussions about race were extremely informal. That did not take away from the serious dialog of the storyteller. In retrospect placing these same conversations in an intentional educational setting today would seem like a race card rant. The only adult who sparked any revelations about Blackness in an educational context was my High School Band Director. He would always say to us that we must prepare ourselves to accept the idea that you will always have to be ten times better than White people just to be considered to sit among them and even then you still are not worthy in many of their minds.

In school, I was in the advanced classes where there were always no more than four African Americans in a classroom of no more than 25 students in a majority African American Junior High and High School. The White students did not exhibit the stereotypes that the African American community of friends and neighbors described. That pattern would follow me for years, even in my professional career. We did not socialize outside of school because of the many segregated neighborhoods. Every ethnic group had a designated area of the city.

I can imagine that, like my early experience, many other African Americans of my generation, may have similar experiences. Discussions about African American

culture and racism were not a formal process. Informally, I had negative depictions as a result of our neighborhoods, schools, and choice of words from elders. Many of the behaviors and attitudes about race and racism that I was exposed to would cause controversy when I was older as I interacted with African American and White people in various levels of economic, social, and political levels. The conversations were never rooted in historical or empirical facts, resulting in friction due to misinformation about African American experiences.

After I graduated, I enlisted in the United States Army (Army). The Army was a way for me to escape the structural racism systems in South Florida that placed young African Americans in a position to become incarcerated or the victim of Black-on-Black crime at some point. The process from Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training, to Permanent Party was a culture shock for many people, but I found a sense of relief. The first thing that everyone had to come to grips with was that in the Army's position, everyone was green. That was it. The Army corralled race and cultural identity from the very beginning. Either you accept that position, or you go home. Under the surface, and out of sight of the people in charge, people would polarize into groups and tensions would rise. This process was a norm from the day that I enlisted in 1985 until the day I retired in 2013.

The only time that race was to be a topic of discussion in a formal manner was during the Command Climate Survey, Equal Opportunity Training (EEO), and Sensitivity Training. The Command Climate Survey is a tool for commanders to address concerns of cultural and racial diversity within their command. EEO was a bi-annual training requirement that attempted to educate soldiers about the army's policy on race,

discrimination, and acceptance. From my experience the training is a “check the box” event that rarely did anything to improve race relations within the units. The team process yields far greater results in curtailing racial incidents and providing soldiers with a sense of cultural appreciation than EEO training ever will. Small teams become brothers and sisters who look after one another and are very serious about that fraternal and sororal bond within the team where ethnicity was rarely an issue within that team.

As I climbed up the ranks, racism emerged through competitiveness and politics. Everything was a competition. Enlisted African Americans could compete, but I noticed that my High School Band Directors theory was correct. African Americans had to excel to get the banner of “squared-away.”

That phrase informs all ranks of soldiers that the soldier is excelling above their peers. African American soldiers had it one of two ways. Either he or she was a “squared-away” soldier, or they were a “dud.” A dud is a soldier who performs marginally.

White enlisted leaders were tougher on African American soldiers who did not comply or strive to be squared-away, which was a tough role in managing. The stress to be as perfect as perceived in the minds of Whites was hard to manage where a failure would catapult a soldier downward very swiftly. I did not witness this phenomenon in Latino or Asian races in my 28 years of service. I did witness that Latino and Asians had challenges with acts of racism but had better success of being accepted by whites as long as they acted White.

The politics in the Army were very apparent and part of the saying, “...it is whom you know.” Promotions and assignments in many cases was a product of a merit-based

system that allowed the people who performed well to benefit. The perception that the more squared-away that you were was a defensible position. The irony was that White Soldiers received better assignments and treatments in the ranks even though they were not as squared-away as other minorities. This practice of structural racism allowed many undeserving Whites to rise to positions where a more qualified minority was waiting for a position. You need to be ten times as talented over an average White soldier that you competed with was the daily perception and position of most minority races. As Whites moved into positions of increased responsibility, they would ensure that their protégé was “taken care of.”

After four years in the military service, I changed my job from a mechanic to an Army Bands Person. Most Army Bands (small) had 39 soldiers assigned to them. Army Band mediums and large can have up to 65. There was very little diversity in the Army bands. In most cases, there were as little as 5 African Americans per band. A few Latinos and Asians were a rarity.

I spent most of my time in Army Bands and my last two years of service as the Command Sergeant Major for a specialty unit of up to 1300 enlisted soldiers. While in the Army Bands, however, I experienced many incidents of systemic racism, microaggressions, and discrimination within the unit and while traveling across the U.S. The same applied while serving in the specialty unit where the racist acts were more politically camouflaged or structural.

After I retired from the military in 2013, I opened my own business. The restaurant that I opened was in a multiracial area in Conyers and Covington, Georgia. I could not attract White customers despite direct advertisement and community

involvement that I partook. I distinctly recall an incident where I placed ads with specials to attract business. White potential customers would drive up or look in the door and turn around. They would not come into the establishment. I found this odd because I had catering contracts with major companies within the region.

After I closed the restaurant and my wife took over the catering business, I struck out to find meaningful employment. I did not have success with any business or company with even an interview despite my employment experiences. The only companies or organizations that called me into an interview were ones that had an African American owner or manager. My resume sat cold on every desk of major companies in Georgia. This included colleges and universities. In fact, a peer and former soldier who worked with me in the military and was a Director at a major University had the opportunity to hire me but did not hire me. I landed a Director's job doing the same type work that he is currently doing. The difference is that the University where he is working has a majority White faculty and staff. I found an open door for work at a predominately African American college with a faculty and staff that is predominately Black.

From my experience, I believe that the Army may be a model for many organizations on how to galvanize diverse cultures. Values and merit-based equality allows any individual the opportunity to excel. Organizations and leaders may find value in creating a competitive workforce by excepting racism as a norm, including diversity and inclusion as norm, and challenging policy by using measures of merit that is based on organizational values and effort.



My interest is to tap into an area that lacks research. Research on military officers is plentiful, including race and culture. Enlisted service members lack representation in the research, except when the research is quantitative, focuses on mental health, or drug and alcohol abuse. My position is that this presents a gap in the research, and a qualitative approach may reveal new information on how African American enlisted soldiers perceive race and culture in a Post 9/11 era.

Chapter IV  
RE-STORIES  
Introduction

There are gaps in qualitative research about racism from the perspectives of enlisted U.S. Army servicemembers. Their voices represent the marginalized voices of working African Americans in the US workforce. U.S. Army enlisted servicemembers usually volunteer for military service after completing high school requirements. Studying this group provides opportunities that may help leaders understand and better prepare their colleges and workforces by reducing factors that support institutional racism within their organization.

Allowing the lived experiences of recently separated enlisted African American service members voices to come forward through their narratives promotes discussions about the experiences of racism from marginalized groups. In this study, each participant's voice came forward through re-story of their experiences with racism before, during, and after military service. They all experienced the Army Core Values and provided insight on how those Army Core Values gave meaning to their lives through the lens of racism.

The narratives of recently separated African American enlisted soldier's experiences on racism before, during, and after military services was the primary focus of this study and asked the following research questions:

RQ 1. How did eight recently separated African American U.S. Army service members perceive racism before military service?

This question formed a base of the participant's experiences that they constructed as reality before military service.

RQ 2. How did eight recently separated U.S. Army servicemembers perceive racism while on active duty?

This question provided the accounts of the participant's experiences and interactions while on active duty. It allowed themes to emerge that challenged their previous experiences, Army Core Values, and conflicting behaviors.

RQ 3. How did eight recently separated U.S. Army service members perceive race after military service?

The questions created a point of resolution for the participant to evaluate who they are and what they believe about racism after being in an environment where racism should be a non-factor.

RQ4. How did the U.S. Army's core values shape your understanding of racism after military service?

The researcher interviewed eight participants focusing on their experiences about racism before, during, and after their military service. Three 90 minutes narrative interviews with each participant over an eight-week period captured their re-stories. The participant's re-story was then re-shaped from the transcription into coded narratives with a beginning, middle, end, and coda. Appendix F outlines the pseudonyms given to the participants to protect their identities.

This method served two purposes for the study. The first purpose was to allow the voice of the participants to re-story their experiences without interruption or subjectivity. The second purpose was to allow their experience of their realities to come

forward. The researcher's voice was present only to guide the conversation to ensure that the discussion of racism remained as the focal point. The re-stories are the verbatim-transcribed narratives from the participant's experiences with racism.

### The Re-stories

*Melinda: "We don't take care of each other"*

Before the military, Melinda grew up in a single-family home in the south. Her family structure was extremely polarizing and complicated. Progression through the K-12 system was not stable with frequent dysfunctional events in her educational matriculation. Her social construction before military service included the normal cadence of life while living in a lower economic environment. Racism and class boundaries were part of the daily complications of being African American within her sphere of existence. The identification of racism within her re-story before military service was not apparent or recognized unless it was overtly obvious.

Her family existed in an environment of abuse, neglect, and economic despair. Her father was abusive and did not provide the support or interest in the family structure. Her mother was the product of family rivalry and dispute. Melinda felt like she was the black sheep of the family, which she believed she inherited from her mother. She stated:

My mother was young, with seven children, very young. She did get married after me. And so, her husband was the father of her last five. I would consider myself the black sheep. I was the black sheep of the family, and I really feel like from the get-go, since I didn't have a dad, and my oldest brother died. His father was in his life. My dad escaped town, so; he was one of those types. And my

grandmother was my everything, but she passed away when I was like nine years old.

Her frequent flight from places to live did not create the family structure that most people would associate as a normal upbringing. Melinda said:

nobody else to protect my mom, so eventually, my mom did get the courage after baby number 7 to flee with us in the middle of a night one night, and we moved to a different city, but things took a turn because my mom was so young back then. My senior year high school, we ended up getting evicted". "And then at first it was okay because I was just a new girl, but then they found out that I was living in a shelter. So, I got picked on quite a bit.

Normal living for her was a nomadic lifestyle consistent with ambiguous daily occurrences of stress that may have created the mistrust and social disjunction of her entire re-story. Melinda said:

I ended up being molested in foster care. We ended up getting evicted because my brother, my older brother was living with us, he got in a shootout with another guy in the apartment complex, and they told my mom, not only did he have to go we all had to go. This friend and her mom allowed me to come stay with them so I could graduate and not have to root me anymore in the midst of my senior year.

School and social life was not stable and created conditions of limited friends and experiences. Everything that occurred socially was within the economic barriers that the communities constructed. "I, I just really hung out with my people, my, my kind because that's where I knew I was comfortable. So, that's just how it was. We didn't really hangout; we didn't really encounter White people like that". Her support from friends

and family was only available during the excursions of moving from one place to the other. Even in schools identifying racism was not a concern. Surviving replaced any other social construct for her and her entire community.

Before the military, ordinary life was ambiguous for Melinda. Her decisions at the entry to adulthood were in step with her family tradition. She became pregnant at the time that she was preparing to go to college. The father did not support her or believed that he was the father of the child. Her mother also abandoned her. Melinda said:

He was protective up until the point when I left to go to college. He was like, oh, you're going to go down there with those young boys because he was, he was seven years old, he is seven years older than me. And I got down there to college and found out that I was pregnant, someone ratted me out to the Dean. The Dean called me in his office, and he already had the withdraw paper drawn. So, I go back home. Well, I call my mom and tell her what happened. And the first thing out of her mouth when she gets there to help me load up my stuff is where do you want me to drop you off at. And she told me I couldn't come stay with her and her man.

She found another support system where she eventually married. "When my son was about one years old, one year old, and he was one of my high school classmates. And he came in like this knight in shining armor". That marriage ended later and after she had joined the U.S. Army.

Her life prior to the military was lived in an environment that was socially, politically, economically, and educational designed for struggle. "We just stayed in our area and, you know, it was like avoidance, it is what it is". The basic need to survive

within this bubble outweighed any lofty thoughts and reverence to individual or communal outcomes to overcome poverty. Melinda stated:

So high school was a struggle because of me having to, you know, babysit to come up with money for stuff. And then, of course, to try to pay my cap and gown and all that stuff that you have to pay for graduation”.

The mind-set for people within this confinement maintained a belief of social welfare, single-parent homes, absentee fathers where women were the head of the house, and schools disinterested in the community. Melinda remarked:

I remember when I did go back to college after I had my son. I went to cosmetology school, school for cosmetology. . . And they was telling us the new teacher was coming in... she had to travel a little way to get there and we was wondering why they didn't get anybody local, and in walks this Caucasian lady. Of course, the way they do hair is totally different from the way we do hair. And we had to teach her some stuff. So, it was, it was kind of comical.

Gangs were the mainstream social constructs for her community. The gangs for her was the power structure and the norm. “For the most part. . . hung out with the boys in the hood, cuz they had little different little groups that was out there. Of course, they had gangs, and I would hang out”.

She saw no other intervening organization that attempted to provide self-determination and help change the diaspora of the communities that she lived in. “They, they were what people consider today thugs, but they were my friends, so you know we looked out for each other. They would not let anybody bother me”. They provided counseling and rational thinking for Melinda’s life choices. She said:

They was like, don't you do that, that's the White man Army. And I was like, what, you know, that was the first time I had ever heard something like that. And I'm like, what do you mean White man's Army? They don't, they don't take care about Black folks they don't care nothing about us, this, this and this, and I'm like, what, so it discouraged me".

The house were people in the community lived, measured wealth, and created social classes in the same neighborhood. Melinda recalled:

We live in the apartment complexes, and across the street were the projects. And we both were considered projects. But there were houses all around us. And I had made friends with some of my classmates that lived in those houses, and I will go to their house and be like, wow this how y'all living over here".

Racism was covertly embedded. Her perception and experience of what racism was, was distorted by the need to survive. Before the military, the normalcy of everyone living within the same conditions did not bring about discussions of racism. The daily concerns were uncomfortably normal for her, her family, community, and friends within their small community. "We were all-black community. My grandmother lived two streets over from us. And her sister lived down the street from us. And so, everybody knew everybody; wasn't much talk about racism".

#### *During the Military*

The military presented some adjustments in the understanding of racism for Melinda. Her previous beliefs about racism competed with the political and cultural climate of power and Army values. She would look to protectors of the Army values to validate her position of what she perceived as wrong or right. Melinda saw racism as a



physical attribute that had little to do with what she determined to be out of order.

Melinda discusses a conflict between her, a White supervisor, and an African American Sergeant Major. Melinda said:

And I'm trying to request time to spend, to get a pass, to spend time with my husband and you telling me no. I have a problem with that, so I ended up getting myself in a, it was supposed to be a AWOL situation. But the Sergeant Major stepped in, and he cleared it up because he felt like she was being hard on me.

The All-White chain of command did not view her circumstance in the same manner as the Black Sergeant Major.

Witnessing the South Carolina Confederate flag removal illustrated how Melinda viewed racism as a physical and obvious act. Racism for her was an act that was not institutional or perceived as embedded in the subtleness of everyday events. Melinda said:

So, like I was saying, we, me, and a bunch of groups of soldiers took leave for that particular day so we could be down there. CNN, you name it, all major news channels were down there, and we counted down to that flag came down, but the KKK was circling the area. So, police presence was super high, and there were a couple of push and shoves, you know. They [police] control that whole situation, but that to me, that was a happy moment.

The flag was the overt physical form, but the statues and monuments are subtle, covert form of racism from her perspective. Melinda said:

And I didn't see it, I saw it as, you know, I will say that I do think sometimes they take people, take it a little too far, as far as saying, we need to take down all the

Confederate stuff, all the statues and this, you know, I think those flags like waving in your face like a slap in the face. But you don't have to; you don't have to see those monuments if you're not in those areas. You know? You don't have to pass them all the time or whatever.

For her, racism is a physical phenomenon, and any other form of racism is normal and an acceptable form of ignorance. Melinda said:

I never really saw color me, but yeah, there was some people that like would spit at; some White people that will spit at you or whatever or say the N-word or whatever and I hate that word, but I really never experienced it. As long as you don't put your hands on me or spit on me or anything, we're good. You can do what you want. Don't touch me, don't touch my children, don't touch my property, and, and darn show better not spit on me because we really going to have a problem. But you know that old saying, 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,' so I let people. . . I laugh at people, for the most part. I try to laugh the situation off and walk away if I can. So, because ignorance is ignorance, they will talk.

Melinda spent most of her interview discussing a situation where she was a victim of sexual harassment. The person who allegedly committed the act of sexual harassment was in a power position and, by her account, used that position in their own interest. "She turned the heat on me and regardless of racism because she started turning everybody against me." "After he turned his back on me and lied to me like he was doing a full investigation." The All-White officer chain of command all eventually took a united stand. "And I don't know what happened, but that Captain eventually told me that

he could not continue to represent. He could not. He said, I'm being told to stand down, and I'm like wow”.

The NCO, who had rank or the ability to help Melinda, also stood down and backed away from the power and interest of the White Chain of command. "I was up against a whole lot of White folks, and some, some followers, some Black followers. And I was really disappointed [in] those Black folks, they were older than me, and still, you let this woman scare you." Sexual harassment was never positioned as a racial incident while she was enduring the tragedy and her predicament. Her knowledge of rules and regulations and the power positions of her protectors were not enough to overcome the power and the privilege of White officers and the political and cultural status that they held.

Unfair positions of duty and authority were also a problem for Melinda. The power structure for one duty assignment used their power for their interest with little regard for minorities. Melinda said:

When I met SFC Ware who I was replacing and he told me how he got moved out of his position, and this SSG, Caucasian that was here got his job. And then I found out and somebody even took pictures, a Caucasian that was hanging out with them, took pictures of them. How they sit around the Commandant, the Deputy Commandant, the E6, and a Master Sergeant, all Caucasian, would get together after work, and have beers and stuff. There are some pictures that circulated, but when I took them to the Captain who I got referred to over at Legal Aid, he told me that the pictures couldn't be used, because that person that took the pictures weren't gonna come forward. And I asked that person and they say

they would rather not. So, he said I'm not saying it's, its right, he said, but I'm, I'm on the inside.

Melinda also discussed being placed outside of her duty position by a lesser ranking soldier even though there were other available senior NCO's also to do the job. Melinda said:

you know there were a total of four of us, E7, all African Americans forced to run the barracks. Instead of sitting in my senior supply position in our office in the supply office over at the Unit the E6 was running my job over there. This dynamic changed once an African American replaced the outgoing White leader. "So, when [new African American leadership] came along a lot of stuff changed at that Unit."

#### *After the Military*

Melinda retired from the military and settled in Atlanta, Georgia. She lives in an all-Black neighborhood. Melinda had to discuss the differences in lifestyles and diversity with her daughter when her daughter had questions about her school and girl scout troop. "She was shell shocked when we got here to Georgia and I, you know, try to explain to her mom is getting ready to leave the Army. I'm retiring and had to explain what all that meant to her". School for her and her daughter were factors in their life after the military. The regular cadence and community in the military were extremely diverse. "The school and girl scout troop that she is in, the one she's in now is all Black. So, and she hated it at first".

#### *Army Corps Values*

Melinda believes values can be an essential factor for equality and inclusion. Still, those values are not possible when Whites have complete power over others, and some Blacks go along with the White privilege: She stated:

Caucasians, cuz they, they felt like they had the upper hand, they feel they had the power, and they rub elbows. Unfortunately, us as African Americans, we don't take care of each other we don't stick up for our jobs. Yeah, there are some amongst the ranks, but nine times out of 10 they [are] rubbing elbows with Caucasians or, you know, whoever they can get in with. Like that one soldier, they took those pictures of them around a barn fire sitting drinking with that SGM and CSM sitting there drinking with that E6 who you have taken me out of my position, and given it to him and put me to work in your barracks like I'm some kind of slave.

Her position on Army Corps Values and their usefulness as it relates to leaders outside the military and organizations are in an indeterminate state:

I respect those who respect me. I'm loyal to those who are loyal to me. You know, as far as selfless service go, I served my country. Do I feel like the military failed me? By all means, I do.

*Mike "We got our work cut out"*

Mike provided a rich descriptive narrative of his re-story that deserves very little interruption. His perceptions and experiences dealing with racism from his voice provides short portraits that re-stories his life before, during, and after the military and how racism was seen through his narrative. His reflections of his re-story today deliver his point of view on the meaning of his perceptions and experiences.

### *Before the military*

Mike grew up in a fractured home and was living on his own at a young age.

Mike said:

My mom, you know, single mom you know my dad was a very rambunctious person and you know he'd be all over you know, the country doing his thing trying to figure his life, you know, and when drugs get a hold of you, you know, makes it very difficult to bounce back from that. So, you know, with my parents you know, were both drug addicts and, you know, trying to get their life together, my grandmother just passed away. So, my mom didn't really have a support system. So, you know how it goes when you don't have a support system. It's like now you have to start making very, very difficult decisions and you know you're raising three kids. No babysitter, no nothing you know we was in a day center sleeping in a shelter and, you know, all these other things. And we finally was able to get on assistance, and that's kind of how we migrated north. But man, it was rough.

He set the tone for the community by explaining:

You know growing up there was a little bit different because you grew up in an atmosphere that is a predominantly Caucasian predominantly White, and your influences are you know what's ever put on the media, you know, so, at a young age you kind of noticed that you different.

### *School*

Mike describes an early account of treatment that he re-stories and then reflects upon the experiences. He said:

I can definitely recall one time, you know, being an elementary school was probably seven eight years old and the music teacher and principal pulled me out of the classroom, you know, I'm seven years old. And they asked me, are you in a gang, you know, because I wear blue every day. Now you know me being seven, I'm not familiar with the, the culture, per se, as far as the gang culture. Now, you know, my family is gang members, you know, but I never, I never looked at that as a reason why we wore blue to school at seven years old. And so, I remember him just interrogating me outside of the class like just making me cry. So, that really kind of affected me just growing up because you, you, you see that you're automatically pinpointed, you don't necessarily know why. I was, I was in a, in a school that was predominantly White. You know, so, I was often, I was often always looked at as the kid that was misbehaving all the time, you know, or like I remember one time I kind of like, just jumped on my homeboys back a little bit, you know, White kid and you know it's early in the morning and the Principal pulled me and he gave me a referral. And I'm like, yo, I, we, going to class we. . . this is what boys do in the morning like everybody's doing this you know but because it was me, or you know, possibly because of color, my skin. I was perceived differently.

### *Boy Scouts*

As a Boy Scout he had the opportunity to stay out of trouble and be part of a positive organization. Mike explained however that:

I think one thing that kind of that definitely like changed my life was the Boy Scouts you know what I mean because we didn't have that you have like any

father figures in the hood. . . they'll spend all the money invested into our boy scout troop so they'll take us to different like camps and jamborees and stuff like that. But we're the only black kids there so most places we get put out, you know what I mean, or they'll be like, oh, y'all can't sleep here, y'all gotta sleep there you know stuff like that.

### *High School*

During high school Mike said he, "left home at 14. I went to five high schools five different high schools. So, I really got a vast experience of just meeting different people talking to different people because I was forced to". He continues to reflect on the experience as a time to "figure out how to survive", and that you "get use to moving". Mike uses this experience to point out the differences in how communities of color receive education. He said:

But then you get to see different cultures so as I went to another high school you know you got, I got to see the Hispanic culture. And I felt like I was treated like a normal person like I didn't feel like I was, you know, picked on or singled out for being Black like I just felt like one of the people that went to school, which was I thought it would be, you know, I thought it would be a different experience for me but it was overall pretty good. But then I went back to McLean which is the hood. So, I got back to McLean which is all Black, and you get treated differently. The only difference that you really noticed is that you go from a White school into a Black school so you can see at a White school you can, there's a lot of programs. There's a lot of things for you to do to keep you active to enhance yourself. And then when you go to a Black school, there's like three



programs, you know, so it's a huge difference in funding it's a huge difference, because you don't get the funding at the Black school.

### *Working*

One lesson that he received from his mother where he re-stories and reflects about his reality growing up. Mike said:

And her explanation was you use them for everything that they got. And you know, and it was kind of like weird because it's like man you've been taught this as a kid and my mom, you know, single parent her mom passed away when I was three. So, her support system was gone, you know, my dad wouldn't help me he's out doing his thing and she got three kids and now she's in the ghetto on food stamps. You know, so she's just trying to figure out how to survive, you know at this point. She don't care about your school grades. She don't care about anything. You know, and it's because she's in a horrible position. And with me being older now, I can fully understand and appreciate that, you know, not be so judgmental about her wrongs and stuff like that because if I were in the same situation. It would be very difficult, you know, you understand why people turn to drugs, because they live in it, they live in, in a, in a hellhole and in an environment, that's is like a black hole. It is hard to get out of here people get shot every day. You got drug dealers on all the corners. You know what I mean, and you have no help. You have no protection. So, you have to figure out how to survive as a woman with three children in the ghetto. You know, like my mom was like, when she used the reference of use White people for everything they have not in the sense of I'm going to, you know, literally use you, but in the sense

of I know you have connections and you can put me in places I can't put myself because of the color your skin. You know, and it took me years to actually learn that.

Mike moved on to discuss how he experienced navigating work environments.

Mike remarked:

I had a White friend in high school and that was the one that got me the job at Walmart and, you know, looked out for me. I bought my first car from him, you know like, the, I was his token Black guy. But you understand that, you know, certain White people you can get in certain doors you know.

In one incident Mike was confronted with a racist verbal altercation he explains how he and his White friend experienced the same event. Mike recalls:

The White guy . . . at self-checkouts and it's not working so I go over to help him. Hey, how you doing today Brother, you know, and he like 'move the f\*\*k get away from me and I'm like, my bad bro I was, I was just trying to, you know, help you, you know, get your items scanning and stuff. He like, I don't need your f\*\*king help, you nigger, I'm just like, because I had never experienced it, this blatant before so when I'm called, called a nigger . . . You know, I want to react... I discussed it with my White homeboy he was the one person I really discussed it with. So, I'm explaining the situation to him. He's awe bro, he wasn't racist bro, and I'm like, how, he called me a nigger bro like that is like, it's like as racist. . . they refuse to believe it I don't know if they want to believe it because if they don't see it, it don't affect them I don't know, but yeah man, we had that discussion and he just, you know, didn't believe it at all. This is the friend where

he started working at a trucking company, at 20, no experience. And he went in as a docking you know just loading the trucks and six months later his mom helped, got him promoted to assistant manager, so you making \$50,000 as a 20-year-old, you feel me.

Mike worked after high school and before the military in maintenance for a state agency. From that experience he documents the following experience. Mike explained:

I'm a maintenance man in these communities so you know this where I grew up. But you get to see it from the other side now. So, now I'm seeing it from the management side, how, you know, Black people and stuff are managed I'm seeing this at 20, 21. I'm just, my eyes are getting more and more open to you know, the realism of the situation. And the whole board is basically White. You know, so, you talked about the president, everybody is White, and they run these Black communities. And you know, the rules, how can y'all dictate what go on here when y'all don't even understand none of this.

### *Police*

Mike discussed his experiences with the police while doing nothing overtly wrong. Mike said:

Oklahoma and Texas like dreads are looked at differently, literally. I remember one time I was pulling out of Burger King. On my lunch break in a maintenance outfit, you know, and I got paint on, you know, I'm going back to work and a cop flick on his light, he come up and, you know, he's like you got any guns or drugs in the car. And I'm like, it is 12 noon. How are you today sir? He's like you got any drugs or guns in the car. I'm like, No, I'm in my work outfit and I'm going

back, I just left Burger King you just saw me leave Burger King, you know, and so he's looking around the car, and he's like, all right, well you have a good day, and I'm just like, what like what was what was this, what was this about you know but you understand that you look differently. And, you know, anybody with dreads in my area, is a thug. That what's automatically assumed. So, you deal with those problems.

### *During the Military*

Mike only served in one duty station before he separated from active duty. He feels that he nonetheless experienced racism. He describes that during Basic and AIT that, “but I don't think the racism isn't as blatant there...most of the people in leadership positions are people of some color”. He describes his first duty station “and the unit that I'm in is like 90% White. So, it's like four Black people three Black people and everything is based on politics when you get inside of the Army”. When he first arrives his all white leadership used jokes like, “like yeah Mike gonna get the machine gun, because you know all the Black people get the machine guns”. Whenever he would speak up “I'm a very outspoken person so I just start speaking my mind, and at this point, I'm starting to get negative counsel”.

The only African American leadership was the Company Commander. He did not provide any support for the climate that Mike experienced:

For example, we got a new company commander; he was Black, you know. My First Sergeant was White. And when I went to him and explained to him like yo I feel like I'm being targeted for being Black, I felt like there's a target on my back. You know, there was never a discussion about it at all in my unit. We had a

discussion with the, I think, like a sergeant came over and pulled all the Black soldiers aside and talked to us in a separate group. But as far as like actual action, I just felt like our Company Commander could have did more, you know, you Black bro. And you're Company Commander. Like you run this. You can change the culture, but I feel like he was really just there to rank up, not gonna step on the First Sergeant toes. He been in this thing 25 years. We got some represents, representation finally and leadership. And this is it. He was the only Black person in our chain of command in our company. Everybody else is White. So, we like, we finally got somebody that can be a buffer. And I didn't get that at all. So, I just feel like there was a lack of action to prevent those type of things from occurring. You think with him being, you know, a younger Black male he would want to pull his Black soldiers aside and talk to them. Like give some advice or something. It look like you in the promised land and we still here slaves and, you know, give us something right. I don't understand but it's just politics man. You trying to get your rank, you ain't trying to step on nobody's toes you trying to get out of here unscathed. You ain't trying to ruffle no feathers so you can get your next rank and move on to your next duty station because you are an officer. This ain't nothing to you.

#### *After Military*

In another situation he circles back to a different incident where he is subject to police profiling, He said:

I was going, going 72 in a 70 and got pulled over. . . and the guy comes up. So, I give them you know, my military ID and my license and stuff. He was like you

was going 72 in a 70. I'm just going to give you a warning don't worry about it. Can you step out the car real quick? I'm just like, yeah, alright cool no problem you know because I don't want no problems I'm just trying to get back on the road. Now, I don't have no criminal record, I'm thinking everything good. And he gave me the warning. I opened the door. And he like Ah. One more question. You got any drugs or guns in the car. And I'm like, nah I'm going to Atlanta, he's like, would you mind if I search. And I was like, well, according to law, you need a search warrant. He said oh you're a smart-ass. And I was like, Nah, I'm just, I'm quoting you, I'm just telling you the law, like, what do you mean, he's like, all right, well I am calling for backup.

### *Reflections on the bubble*

After the military Mike reflects on his community and the overall institutional racism that he perceives is that of a bubble. He said:

When you in Oklahoma you're in a bubble you know what I mean, and, they do a very good job at keeping you in a bubble. But once you get out of that bubble and you can see from the outside looking in, it's a different perspective, you know, and that's a hard pill to swallow you know what I mean. Because the way I view the world versus the way my family views the world is completely different now. And that's because I was able to get out of the black hole. I think the bubble, is, is relevant everywhere. I've seen the bubble in different places I lived. But yeah, after getting out of the bubble and just being able to experience more, you understand it is everywhere, but you also understand that there are a lot of opportunities.

### *Army Corps Values*

Mike believes that the Army core values is a tool that could help mold people's tolerance to work towards goals. He said:

I think that if people could really you know apply the Army core values to their lives, I think it would really benefit in a number of ways. Biggest thing is, you know, integrity, you know, thing that I didn't like about the soldier earlier was his integrity. But also, I think, a problem with most people is they don't like to be held accountable. That's the problem.

He continued his explanation of his views on how racism cannot impact the good of what comes from having rooted core values. He said:

They should impact your life from a positive perception in my opinion. I don't see any negatives for it, because I use them now for my company so you know and I think it works wonders man I'm getting my guys to do things that they never thought they could do.

His final thoughts and reflections on the basic principles of common core values by stating:

If we all, we live the core values it's like the Declaration of Independence. 50 people came in a room and communicated and created a country and wrote it on paper off of communication. We can't do that. So, yeah man we got we got our work cut out for us but I think it just, you know, takes more people standing up more people speaking out more people being unafraid and helping change the standard.

*Tammy "I didn't feel racism"*

Tammy grew up in a single parent home. She was the oldest and had many responsibilities placed on her. She has a quiet nature and is not easily impressed or excited. For her racism is not a real experience that she easily identifies. As a young child she re-stories:

Back in my younger days, we stayed in public housing and my mom she was on section eight. So, it was times we had to, I know this time we got evicted it was times we had to move into apartments with no furniture. It was times we have to go to church for service and like asked, the people, but we're having to fend for whatever; so we will have a meal at night or take care of our self while our mom is out doing what she needs to do to get the bills and stuff paid.

Tammy recalls the that her father "he wasn't too much in my life he was, but he was it was kind of like, a in and out, or I call again, but I'll come, come get you. Never comes to get me, like, that type of situation". When it came to discussions about racism in the home, Tammy described a conversation that her mom had with her and her siblings about racism. She said:

At home, which of course we did, because I have a brother who's a black male and he got into an incident with the police, and it was like the police was saying racial slurs and whatever to him. And my mom was telling my younger brother, like this is the society we live in, like, you know about what happened back in the day with the slavery and how the Whites didn't like the Blacks and she would just let him know that it still goes on till this day, and you just have to be careful of how you go about things because of the color of your skin.



Tammy had limited exposure to other races growing up and in her account rarely encounter racism from her perception, prior to military service:

You didn't really see too many different other races, except for like the beauty supply stores. And everything was majority African American over there in the area. And we stayed in an area majority of our life, from the time I was born up until the time I left to go to the military we stayed in that area.

She had to have witness racism in a physical definite construct to accept that the very thing that she witnesses was racism. Tammy said:

I kind of knew about it, but I didn't really never see it firsthand. Like, I hear people with their stories about how racism and so, for me to see it because I was there when it happened. At first it was like, okay, but then it's like, oh, that was really something racist, because of what he said, and the words that he used. I was like, this police officer, they had the authority but also, they need to treat everybody equally. So that was what I took from the situation that happened.

When Tammy was in the third grade, she had a questionable situation where she could not make sense on whether racism was a factor or not. Tammy said:

I did have one class I was in the third grade. This is my first white teacher, that I've had since I was in school, and I was always getting in trouble in that class. I was trying to figure like, it was like I always go on to ISS which is In School Suspension, or I was always having to go to another classroom. So, my mom she stayed up there in the school cuz she's trying to figure out like why? Like, she's never had no problem out of me. She's trying to figure out what's going on. So, it, like one little incident that happen the teacher said I had stolen some pens or

something off of his desk and he just use to nitpick, so I stayed in trouble in the third grade but after the third grade I finally got over this situation and my fourth and fifth grade I was good.

Tammy moved around a lot and had different experiences in the schools that she attended through her K-12 career:

I was in sixth grade; I was in two different middle schools. The first middle school I went to was M, and that was like, like you just go to school teachers really didn't care, but they care, but like they care to pass you, like they wasn't really making sure we was getting what you needed, or taking the time out to understand that you're not understanding what's going on. So, after that school I went to this school called Bear C. It was kinda in a high-class area. So, you could kind of tell the teachers were pretty much like questioned you, they kind of knew if you knew what you were doing or not and if you had questions they wasn't trying to like down talk to you or make you seem like it was a stupid question. They will always say, no question is stupid. And then when I got to high school. I went back to the Park area for high school. And it was, it was okay but a struggle a little bit.

She reflected on how she experienced the multiple moves Tammy said:

So, the people who the house that we were moving into there was like their first time ever renting to a Section 8 person, so I guess like once they heard the stories and stuff. We just moved and hopefully the next time we'll settle down, and we don't have to move within a year or two. So, we can kind of like stay there to finish school because I went to like four different schools so yeah.

*During the military*

During the military Tammy had a few incidents that she reflected on in her re-story where she interprets her first noticeable experience where she felt racism may have been a factor. In one incident she recalls being in AIT how the only White Platoon Sergeant in the company led them through their training:

So, my Platoon Sergeant she was White in the majority of the people in the platoon, we was African American, Black. She had her days where she would come in, cuz everybody was like y'all Platoon Sergeant don't like y'all like it was just something about her that she was always nitpicking at our Platoon. And it was, because it was to a point where we will have the go to our Master Sergeant, because it was to the point where she would get out of hand or she started cussing. Like we could be in formation with everybody. And the other two African American Platoon Sergeant see her, see her going off on us and for no reason. And it was like okay so what's the issue?

She also describes other incidents that raised questions about the intent of her leader:

Tammy said:

It was maybe three or four White people in our platoon. And we, it was like we supposed to rotate [duty] by room started from the beginning and go on to the back. And you, most of the days you would, we do like two hours and then they could switch. Like it was three of them, and they can switch within their hours. But, with us we will have to do, like, the whole night. Like, it was no switching or doing half a shift, and someone else do another shift. We will have to. But she made it into a way where it seemed as if it was equal how everyone else was

doing it. But we knew that it wasn't right because we was standing up all or half of the night. But when it was their time to do it, it was like. It wasn't as many times as we was doing it.

She continued to discuss the leadership of the Platoon Sergeant when it came to the Platoon Sergeant to allow the trainees to assume leadership positions with the following re-story. She explains:

The student leadership they were also [Student] Platoon Leader which was a leadership position. But it was always the White people in the positions. So after you sit back and think about it, it's like okay, well maybe why was they like, every time we had to pull out a hat, she would do the hat, and we put our name in there, it is supposed to rotate but, it's like the same people name was getting picked. Like, it may be two weeks and they have the same person two weeks later the same person.

Her first duty station in Fort Bliss, Texas was a very pleasant duty assignment. She did not recall any issues of racism. When she went to her second duty station, Tammy was in a 60-soldier company with about 12 other African Americans and an all-White Chain of Command. Her Squad leader was the only African American in a leadership position. Tammy remembers that all four African Americans in her Platoon had complaints of racism against the leadership. In this situation the company First Sergeant was “nitpicking”.

I wasn't the only one because I brought it to my Platoon Sergeant's attention cause it was bothering me, and I wasn't the only one feeling like that. Like they was picking on picking on them too. So, it was noticeable.

Tammy was not sure that racism was the only factor. “I didn't feel like I was, like I was the, I wouldn't say, I look back, it could have been racial because could have been female yeah, could have been because I'm a female in an infantry unit”. She concludes by saying:

The Commander he was one of those. He was like, I don't want to call him a jerk but, he was like, whatever the XO or the First Sergeant said, he went with. They was just, they was like, they was all in cahoots together in fact they was trying to get me out of there for whatever reason. And, before I got out, my sergeant, they kicked him out.

*After military service*

Tammy returned to her familiar areas where she grew up in the Atlanta Georgia area. She avoided moving back to the area that she spent during her K-12 career. She pointed out that:

I noticed when I came back the area that I did stay in before is really bad. Like people are being killed over there every day. Its drug infested. It's all kinds of crazy stuff going on there. Like, over there, like I think in the Kroger, they have like glass doors inside of, of the Kroger where they have different areas blocked off like you got one way in and one way out. Yeah.

As she continues to explain that racism is not something that she deals with. “So, I know what, I know what, like, what racism is, and I know, I know it when I see it but as far as me having encountered it. I don't but I know people who may say they have”. She does feel that sometimes she can tell when there is tension from other races.

I stay in a predominately white neighborhood, but you have a small percentage of African American. White people there so. . . they are like overly nice like, they're really nice. So you can tell it, you can tell when somebody when they faking or you just kind of you tell that, it's just like they're just smiling and thank you and after every little thing or, I don't I don't know how to explain is just overly nice.

She next describes what she feels is a subtle form of racism that she would overlook but people who she is close with addresses head-on. She said:

The lady who rings up the stuff, so, when you go to hand her your money, you give her your money and when she gives you the money back like, she puts it on the, on a little thing. And there's been times where she had done it to like, maybe somebody of a different color behind us and my mom will just sit and wait to see like, what is she gonna do, the same thing that she did to us, and she didn't. She actually like handed them their money in their hand. So, I'm not confrontational at all so my mom being who she is, she spoke out about it.

Tammy reflected on the stereotypes that people have with Black people and from her experiences she has had after the military when going out with friends she explains:

I mean, I haven't really experienced it, but I know is there. I try to avoid getting put in that type of situation. Really, you don't know when you going to be put in a situation. But I tried to pretty much avoid it, and, and when I say they think that Black people steal, I'm guessing because of all the crime that's going on and everything is happening its always African American.

*Army Core Values*

Tammy believes that the Army Core Values can contribute to help leaders and organizations create civility. She is equally convinced that people have an individual choice to monitor their actions. “This is our mission statement and core statement, but it's up to the person to want to abide by or live up to the values, live up to the core values”.

She believes that leaders in any type of organization has the responsibility to lead by example. She said:

So basically, you're telling me to be the best person I can be or be loyal and, I don't see that in return and I will feel like, how you gonna tell me to do something and you're not even doing it yourself. So, I feel like if all the leadership's practice what they preach, then like everybody will not be right, but eventually we'll get on a bandwagon and do what they're supposed to do the correct way.

When she addresses workforces applying core values Tammy said, “they kinda do have the values and live up to them. If the workplace, puts it in practice, then. . . I don't know, it's kind of like in between.

*Kelvin “Racism was understood”*

Kelvin was raised in a two-parent home although his mother and father divorced and his mother re-married when he was younger. “At a young age, my parents divorced. It was about around age five or six years old. My mom remarried another military guy my stepdad”. He grew up in a military family and he frequently moved from one place to the other, “We moved around a lot”. From that existence, Kelvin’s experiences provided him with a prior military environment that was rich in diversity. “Especially with me,

traveling from different place to place. Throughout the different grades. I was exposed to different sports, a lot of different kids”.

Kelvin’s home life was typical for a military family where both parents and a family support system were present. In his home, “It wasn't really much of a talk about race. . . it seems like racism was kind of understood and doesn't need to be explained type of issue”. And at school, “just due to the environment they didn't really let things like that get conversated in depth anywhere. Kelvin feels that racism is “more passive now than it is aggressive”. To friends in school racism was “You always try to find the humor in it”. He looks to further explain his thoughts of racism prior to military service. Kelvin stated:

Some of the actions that you have to carry out to, to show your racism and if they're not hurtful, they're sometimes humorous in their attempts. So overall generally people you know, I feel like you try to speak seriously about it, but the, the outcome always kind of seems ridiculous. I think that's what keeps racism from being such a such a strong thing to keep us away from each other. Eventually seem like everybody ends up kind of finding something they like in everybody, so.

He also mentions that some racial things can be “scary”. Kelvin said:

I got exposed to some racism in a way that it kind of shed light on how serious that it can be. Just being out riding through a neighborhood where it's typically all White. Me and my grandfather one evening after church Sunday. They realized it was some Black people riding down that road and some shots went out. I don't know if they were directed at us, but we definitely had to get out the area.



And it just kind of let me know that you know, even though my, my grandfather wasn't afraid he was definitely aware and alert. And it wasn't something necessarily to be afraid about. But just the understanding that you know that things can, things can escalate pretty quickly when you're not when you're not doing intelligent things. So just the stupidity of the things people try to do, to exert a racism can seem silly, but it also can be serious when it gets really just illogical.

Kelvin further explained how in sports racism is both part of the culture yet illogical.

Kelvin said:

as a victim of racism to my younger years coming up through school, on a sports teams, you'll hear just different little have different experiences, where players try to get at you, you don't know if it is racism directly personally towards you or just because of the fact that we're in competition right now. But you definitely, you hear a lot of you know when you being competitive in sports, or you just being competitive in general, with a lot of people but it's nothing that I really took to heart. Just more or less, just you know, stupid people do stupid things. Just try not to make it personal.

In his experience's racism "was done by groups of people never by individual people coming to me directly".

*During the military*

While serving on active duty Kelvin understood the team process but there were obvious actions that were not logical and counter to the military values but seemed

normal and just part of the daily life in a military unit. “We had a company of 50-60 ...I was one of the only Black servicemember”. Throughout his service Kelvin said:

I wasn't prepared for how often I would be the only Black person in the room, or the only Black person working on a job or person of color. And that's something that I feel like I still hold to this day. I kind of got the clue that I wasn't looked upon for special duties. Like my other counterparts, it got to the point where I would just be asked to stay back.

Kelvin pointed out that “Most of my leadership. Were Caucasian males. Very often, ever so often you see someone other than that in leadership. And I wouldn't, I wouldn't dumb that down to race, but I would say race played a part in that”. Kelvin said:

There weren't a lot of diversity, was not a lot of diversity. Oftentimes I would be the only person of color on the job or catch myself in a room or in a shop, sometimes I will be working, look up, I'm the only Black soldier in in the motor pool, regardless of rank.

When there were a group of Blacks in the shop. Kelvin said:

They didn't like to see us in groups and seemed like we were separating ourselves from the majority even though we could tell there was a difference between those who hung out and drank beers and, and went fishing together and those who didn't.

During off duty time, Kelvin explains “you were either in the in group or the out group”.

I would spend time with my family. I had a lot of guys invite me to go drinking and fishing. . . wasn't really my thing. But that was something that everybody kind of, you

know, did as the in group. I would say there was definitely an in group and an out group as far as those who hung out together after work hours and those who didn't.

From the cultural approach to his experience he did not feel that the unit was culturally receptive to African American culture. Kelvin said:

I guess when it came to, to the culture aspects holidays were definitely odd.

Whereas I would eat different foods, they wouldn't. Days I would celebrate they would kind of take a back [seat] And it wasn't much of a I wouldn't say there wasn't much openness towards learning about other people's cultures in the military lifestyle, unless they were foreign.

Even diversity training was a, “for the most part we just clicked through the slides and make sure everybody shared their pieces, kept it pretty business”. His views of his time in the military and the community that he lived in harbored bias views of African Americans. He said:

But I definitely was aware of my position when it came to the, the subculture groups in the, in the area. With me not, with me not correlating with the majority, I stood out. And there wasn't much of an embrace for people who weren't Black or military.

#### *After Military service*

After an honorable discharge from the military, Kelvin fought through some of the typical difficulties that many service members faced. “I was more self-conscious about how I was going to provide and how I was even going to provide for myself”. He did have family and friends who assisted him through the tough times. “I was homeless I'd say about four or five months. Slept in my car, friends' floors, buddies that was still

in the service just looking out for me until I figured out what I was going to do”. Jobs that he wanted were out of his reach and the only things that were offered were jobs that were beneath his technical skills as an aircraft mechanic. Kelvin said:

Once I got out, I made few interviews at a couple places that I was interested in. I filled out a bunch of resumes, but all those interviews, ultimately I never received an offer for a job in that area, which was kind of odd but not surprising, dealing with the fact of the demographics I was living in, regardless if I was in the service and just got out or not. The only jobs that were mostly available were servicing positions at resorts or hotels in the area. That's where I was only able to find part-time work at.

He eventually took an offer from family members in Atlanta, Georgia and begin attending college. In his life after the military Kelvin said, “mostly I stay... they're mostly I'd say... guys that, friends that I either worked with at some point or went to school with at some point. And don't really go out to do things around town to meet new people”. He said that he is, “a loner like a foreigner in a new place”. His rationale is “I try not to get too close to people, because I subconsciously feel like I'm going to move in the next six months, or I may end up at another duty station”.

He experiences and discussions about racism come about more often after having been out of the military. Those conversations are that “We will speak about racism as such as, not so much as something that you hear. The stuff that you see and don't see...some people with racism would now become more passive”. He explained a conversation that he had with some friends with about racism. Kelvin said:

As you wouldn't hear racist remarks, as much as you would now. You wouldn't hear racism remark as much as you would back then. Now people are more secretive with it. They will let you leave the room to be racist or wait to you shut the door to be racist about you to others or just in general. It's not so much of a in your face racism. We talked about how you kind of almost have to live a double conscious. That the people that you deal with, that are not like you or not a part of your group. If you're not a part of the large group that you're most likely gonna have to at some point interact and mingle and portray to be part of the group to a point, point where you have to actively participate with the game.

He also believes that African Americans have a social need to fit in. Kelvin remarked:

You deal with it because that's, It's almost like, I'd say it's a natural type of feeling I would say people, those who wish to conform with our society have to go through. If you not in the in group, you're going to do everything you can to be a part of it. Unless you want to be in the out group and even then, you're being covert in your actions as to not being the out group. But if you're trying to assimilate in this society.

Kelvin continues by stating:

I say assimilate because the way society and the way things are done at home are obviously not gonna be the way the society that we live in is not natural. Even with, with, within inside of your home versus to the outside world, things that go on in society that are not naturally going to occur when it comes into a controlled situation or control society. I feel like when you, when you're not dealing with people outside, or those like you; when you're not dealing with those like you,

unnatural things are going to happen, because you live in an unnatural society, making that unnaturalness natural is either gonna give you an issue to where you can't go for one or the other, where it's going to have you where you're torn between the two and you're just stuck in a balance in act.

### *Army core Values*

Kelvin looks at the Army core values as a tool that can help shape the good nature of people who has the discipline to apply them. Kelvin stated:

So those, those core values. Definitely I feel like will help anyone that can work them into their lifestyle. To where racism will, won't be an issue and it'd be something that you can find opportunity to teach. I feel like everyone should be connected with at some point will be the guide that everyone follows in their path but definitely core values will give anyone and everyone a standard that we all can relate to and meet at. Yes, definitely. Core values in discipline and core values in any organization is going to benefit in all of those areas. And we have to make sure that those core values are those geared towards just that.

He believes that the values have shaped him to be a better person than if he had not been in the military.

Those values. I feel like you have to give them, I had to give them my own personal attachments. With me not doing that line of work anymore around those type of people in that environment. I have to personalized values to, to, to accommodate me. Now I treat my classmates and my coworkers as I would my battle buddies.

Kelvin shared that it is his belief that “organizations and leaders are not as successful in the, the civilian world due to, because if you don't share the same discipline values or core beliefs, you're obviously going to be at odds when it comes to decision making”. For him Kelvin said, “I feel like everyone should be connected. . . core values will give anyone and everyone a standard that we all can relate to and meet at”.

*Anthony “The right way”*

Anthony was raised in the south. He was living with his single mother and his two sisters. He would often stay with his father in a completely different lifestyle.

Anthony said:

Compared to congested area where my mom stayed and it's always loud at night.

It was never a quiet moment. Being with my mom. It was more of you had to be on your toes. The, the crime rate was high compared to my dad crime rate was very low. You really didn't have to worry about nobody breaking in the house.

You can literally leave the door unlocked and nobody won't even attempt to go in there.

His father lived in a quieter neighborhood in South Carolina. Antony mentioned:

With my dad [neighborhood] was quiet. It was probably like three black families in the neighborhood. So, we couldn't do a lot compared to what my mom...kids was always outside everybody knew everybody.

The time that he spent living with his father provided him with opportunities to understand the differences between living in the city in a majority Black environment and in the suburbs living and interacting in a majority White environment. He said:

We always walk to the nearest park to the swim center to the basketball court but once I moved with my dad it wasn't like that. I was, it was mostly I'm outside by myself, or stay in the house and play video games or something.

His existence interacting between the two environments was different in school, and socialization living with his mother he said, “a couple of teachers and the principal went the same church as my grandmother.” Getting into trouble was not an issue because “If anything I had my two sisters to protect me.” Living with his father was mentally tougher. “Once I moved my dad it was hard because I really couldn't be myself; it was hard to get friends.” His perceptions were that anything associated with his Black environment was bad and that any of the teachers where his dad lived associated with him with the stereotype of that area. Anthony pointed out:

The teachers were different because the teachers know I came from a different district. So, they know the difference between the district seven which I was in with my mom to district six which is what, I was with my dad. So, they knew it was totally different teaching style and kids' behavior. So, some teachers have assumed I was a bad kid, but I wasn't, they just assume because I came from that area.

He experienced racism through what he saw as the differences in lifestyles and wealth. Anthony said:

So, a couple of teachers asked what school did you come from and I told them. It was, oh you came from district seven, which a lot of people know district seven is where mostly, most of the black kids go to, which in District six is mostly if your



parents is like. . . have, what a consider wealthy family and contribute to the school like Booster Club and stuff like that.

His White friends were limited on the extent of time and effort that they put into the relationships due to parental limitations and stereotyping. “because just the way I carry myself the way I talked. The way I acted. I mean I didn't change up”. He felt that teachers also bought into the negative predictors of who he really was although his schoolwork was on the same level as the White kids or well-behaved Black kids. “I was like, I like to joke a lot and stuff like that but I still got my work done, teachers didn't like that”.

Racism was not talked about in the home. In the streets people really did not talk about racism as in particular but associated events to physical forms of police treatment and information gather through the news. “I always heard people talking about the police this, and the police that, when it comes to us.” It was normal to see police very active in his neighborhood. “I didn't understand why they kept getting in trouble, I just knew when something was not cool to do and ended up doing something else. I wasn't worried about the police.” He maintained strict tolerance to the confinements of his neighborhood. “Because I didn't really hang around other races, when I stayed with my mom because it was like most black people didn't roam around to different areas”.

#### *During the Military*

Anthony entered the military as an Infantry soldier and fully aware of the perceptions of others in the selection of his military job choice. Anthony said:

We had kids that was, that was racist towards Black people because they think Black people, the, the only thing we can do is Infantry because of the GT score so

low, but my GT score wasn't low I [was] just being hardheaded and just pick the job.

He was not aware that in his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) there were not many African Americans. “The select Black people that was in a platoon because we only had three Black in the whole Platoon it's only, it was like 40 people.” During basic and AIT his adjustments to military life did not have many racial experiences but he did understand how his Platoon Sergeant was treating the few blacks differently. Anthony explains:

But he didn't really like black people, because he, he always pointed out certain ones in a platoon and always basically like push them to quit, push them quit.

Just quit just go home, just quit, just go home, but when it's another race doing the same exact thing, he'd motivated them. Come on man you got it blah blah blah... so we only have three of us and he did the same thing with all of us.

He then provided an explanation for the behavior of the Platoon Sergeant, “he always had family problems, so he had to take it out on us; his anger out on us”.

During his first duty station in Germany Anthony “felt like a king”. His experience in another country was a momentous opportunity and superseded his family and friends’ expectations back home. His experiences during his first duty station did come with acts of racism within his work and social experiences. Anthony said:

Some places in Germany didn't like Black people, which I didn't know until I went to certain towns and they look at you funny, as in like just staring at you, or they'll notify the Polizei. And then they'll come ask you what are you doing, what brings you here? Or do you need help? But I knew why you came up to me, but I

dealt with that a lot, even going through different airports they always ask only the Black people the same thing. What brings you here?

His platoon had only Black supervisor within the company. “So, we had one Platoon Sergeant who was Black he was the only one, he was a E7. And we had a, we had probably like, three Black people per platoon, like literally like three people”. That team, as he re-stories, all worked together despite the onlooking and perceptions that crept into his mind. Anthony pointed out:

We saw how it, how we was being treated. The, the, the Sergeant, they didn't like us to talk, like, just us talking, because they was like, oh, what y'all think y'all back on a block or y'all homeboys or y'all from the same hood, just wanted us to react.

He credits his platoon Sergeant with keeping his soldiers focused despite their treatment. Anthony said:

We just didn't want to come to work and like, find a reason not to be there, because it was always something that was wrong, that we didn't do. My, my Platoon Sergeant was very motivational because he was in the same boat. He dealt with the same thing with other NCOs and they had complaints on him and everything, so he witnessed it. So, he mostly was our, he talked to us every day he showed us the ins and outs and he motivated us to like, be better, to want to be ranked.

Any incidents that were reported that had racial concerns was ignored by the NCO support channel chain of command. “When we reported it to the First Sergeant. The First Sergeant, talk to us, talk to the Sergeant, and it all gets pushed under the table,

and it just happened every day”. Anthony provides an explanation why he believes the White NCO’s treated him and others the way that they did. The only time that things changed a little was when the soldier begin to get rank. “So, once they knew that we knew something, then they let up on us or they started giving us a little bit more respect. The rationale that Anthony attributes to their treatment was, as Anthony stated:

This guy's fresh out of basic, no training. He don't know anything or this guy's Black Infantry, which they always say, oh, Black people only doing it for two reasons because they don't know anything. They just know how to shoot, which they were wrong.

While stationed at Fort Stewart his second duty station, Anthony was faced with racism and poor morale. “I think Fort Stewart just changed me as a person. Just the way I acted compared to coming from Germany”. The White NCO showed no respect even when you had a little rank. “And I had an NCO just, just cursing me out. He was like where you come from?” Anthony was protected by his African American Platoon Sergeant as he mentioned:

Fort Stewart was very, very heavy on racial issues, because if, if you didn't have a...if you didn't have a ranger tab and you were Black, then you wasn't gettin promoted, unless you really like kiss somebody butt. I got promoted, only because I had a Black Platoon Sergeant. I'm pretty sure if I didn't have him, I wouldn't have got promoted because I was fast tracking. But once I got there I slowed down. And I think part of it was me because I didn't push myself hard enough or let these people get to me as in, I wanted to like not re-enlist. I want to get out. So, it took me five years to get my E5.

Deployments were scary but the comradery and respect between the ranks and ethnicity was mutually plausible. “Everything that happened back at Fort Stewart wasn't happening in Afghanistan. And that is because everybody wanted to come home. Nobody wanted to be on nobody’s bad side. Everybody wanted to be a family”.

#### *After the military*

Anthony believed that his, “transition was hard”. It took him, “about six months to re-adjust”. He came to Atlanta and school because his wife lived in Atlanta and was going to college. Although he does not engage in discussions about racism, his wife does so, “almost every day”. When the researcher asked the guiding question “what kind of conversation you and family members have about surrounding racism and, and your time in the military” Anthony began to discuss his personal changes that other people saw in him. When the question was repeated, Anthony said: “My, my dad. He don't, he's really not heavy on the racism. Neither is my mom, but my wife, she talks about it every day”.

#### *Army Core values*

Anthony maintained that leaders and organizations have the responsibility to help shape him to be respectable and do what is right. He believes that the values that he learned like respect, is a life-long attribute that helps distinguish right and wrong.

Anthony said:

that they can make or break you as a person that you can learn from others about the Army values, if you have a leader that doesn't respect you, or respect someone else, you will learn not to be that leader. I wouldn't respect someone who is a leader who is not showing me the respect or showing me the right way to be a Soldier, the correct way.

*Martin “Re-think my position”*

*Before the Military*

Martin was raised by both of his parents who divorced. He lived with both parents during different times throughout his youth. He has had encounters with the police and was extremely defiant with school officials. He had to work during his high school years while dealing with his juvenile issues. All these factors had an impact on how he experienced racism prior to the military.

Martin said that his mom and him, “we never really had any explicit conversations where we would say like oh, them or anything like that it was just more implied.” Discussions about race was not a real conversation. Martin thought that his Hispanic mother, his father was Black, had mistrust of Blacks. Martin said:

I feel like she had this preconceived notion like okay, this because we were already staying in a poor neighborhood so it was like, if we're in a poor neighborhood these kids gotta be up to no good and they gotta be like doing drugs, gangs, stuff like this.

His dad was the opposite “I didn't see that at all in my dad to a certain degree, he had friends of all races and they all will come over”.

*School*

Martin became very frustrated with school, “I woke up my 11th grade year I told my mom, I said, I'm done with school. I'm not going anymore”. One of his frustrations was he said, “I had white teachers in all classes growing up. For the most part, I say about 80% of them were fair, to me, you know, but then it was a 20% where they was just looking at me like, he's a waste of time”. His reason for this position was:

Because every time in life, like every time I got in trouble, it was always a White person involved. Like, they were either calling the cops on me, they were either coming out to say something, they were trying to accuse me of shoplifting, they were following me around the store. All my negative experiences, I never had any negative experiences from Black people

### *Social*

Martin has had a few encounters that helped shape his perceptions on racism. He said:

I was in 11th grade; I was up in Richmond with my mom. And it was a car full of us. I remember we were going; we were supposed to go to this house party. Now all of a sudden, all these cars pull up. And then the dogs, dogs coming up and they are like everybody put your hands, get out the car. They take us out the car and put us on the ground, they put us in handcuffs, put our hands behind our back, and then they like search the car tear the car down, but they didn't find nothing. We really didn't have, we didn't have anything, and then at the end of it all, you know we asked like, why do us like that? Like, what's the reason for that? And I remember the cop was like, Oh, we seen y'all with a gun. I am like, I'm like you lying, y'all ready to kill us and y'all don't even know, like, and we just kids. We about to lose our life over nothing.

Martin believed that he was unfairly treated, and racism was an influence in his treatment as a youth while working. He presented this experience. He explained:

I was the only Black guy and I didn't even find out about this until after they wanted a cashier, they actually wanted two, and I was like, damn, I've been I've

been here for like four or five months you know what I'm saying? They was looking for a cashier. Maybe it was like a month later, they done took one of the, the baggers and he was the cart getters from the other shift and moved him up to cashier and then instead of like, picking me, you know, I'm saying they just hired a whole new White boy cashier and I'm just like, damn, I'm looking at my manager, she was some old White lady. I was looking at her like, damn. I never, I didn't say this to her but in my head, I never was even considered, do you know what I'm saying like, as much as I do, it hurt me a little bit because it's like, damn, you know, I'm saying I'm doing everything you asked me to do like, how could you not even consider me for this job.

Martin presented his position from his experiences about the workforce and the diversity and position of Blacks and Whites. He said:

That's one thing I always noticed everywhere I've worked. It was like, the Black they can get the unique jobs, but you'll never get the supervisory type job, you know what I'm saying? So like at the grocery store you can get a deli job, but you're not gonna be a shift supervisor or manager, you know what I'm saying, when I was at Subway, it was like, hell you see either the manager or the Assistant Manager and they was both White. I noticed like the highest the highest Black person I saw was maybe like a shift lead or something like that. But it was never Manager or Assistant Manager. It was never nothing like that. So, I mean, that's that's how I view that. I was like, man, I guess I'm just here for a paycheck. You know?

He then brings his thoughts to a coda by saying:



Oh, how I saw it before the military. I mean, I had it in my, the way I saw it in my head was if you're a minority, you know, black, brown, Asian or whatever, and I'm not so much concerned about them. But if you Black, you got to do something. You got to do something out of the ordinary, you got to do something to stand out. And that's why I latched on to the military because I was like, all right, this is a game changer to me. This can totally change my landscape. You know what I'm saying? I was like, 17. I, and nothing was going for me. I was like, I was flirting with the idea like, Bro, I could get locked up. And I wouldn't have to worry about food. I don't gotta worry about clothes. I don't got to worry about, you know what I'm saying, what I'm going to... where I'm going to sleep at night because it was at one point in time. You know, I was walking around the streets all night and I didn't have no money for food. I got kicked out of my dad's spot. So, I was just walking around at night I'm tired of this, like, if I at least if I go to jail or go to prison, and my basic needs are met, and then you know, I guess I could wrap my head around, you know, just losing my freedom, but it just felt hopeless like that to me.

Prior to the military he also felt that White people was purposefully against Black advancement. He stated:

I'm saying Mexicans and like Latinos, we kind of seeing them at the same level as it's like y'all struggling like we struggling. Asian, we just looked at them like man, you're just in your own bubble in your own world. It was just the White people. White people, we felt like they were coming out their way to come mess with and to come make sure that we couldn't get something. Make sure we just

didn't have our way or whatever. We can be, too many of us walking down the street the police get called.

He provided an example of how he challenged authority to prove who would alert authorities over him. After being upset that he had to go live with his father Martin said that he went to a gas station, "I stole like I stole on purpose just to get caught and I didn't get caught. So, I was still mad at that. I stole all this bubblegum right in they face, but it's a Black community or whatever". The persons attending the gas station were African America and refused to call the police. Martin said:

And so, I'm back in my neighborhood now. I started opening the bubblegum and, I'm throwing it against people window throwing it against people window you know, just trying, not doing too much. And then, you know, as I'm as I'm hitting, they window, these my neighbors, they know me, you know what I'm saying, we're the same color. I messed around hit one of the windows. It was some White guy. I remembered he opened his door and stood behind the screen door and started talking all this junk. And he ended up calling the police on me, fine, but it was him. . . and I seen him. I was like Oh, yeah, he he's gonna call the police on me. I know he is. You know, and sure enough he did. You know, when the police came, but they let me go, you know, whatever like that.

#### *During the military*

Martin begin to change his views about people but maintain an awareness about racism. "I was I wasn't seeing color to a certain extent all I'm seeing is BDUs you know what I'm saying". His experiences with new people and the air of equality in the military training begin to redefine his thinking and actions. Martin said:

The only difference is their skin color and maybe situation they born into, you know, but it's literally the same as me. And so, you know, I carry that I carry that with me to AIT. By the time I got it I softened my stance a little. I didn't have to be the hardest person in the room. I wasn't even worried about that.

One of the things that redefined his thinking was his Battle Buddy. "I remember my battle buddy was a Greek White boy, you know what I'm saying, from Florida. And, but over time he got close to me. . . my closest homeboys because we all we had". From those 9 weeks in basic training Martin said:

So I had tolerances for people that I thought I had no tolerance for, you know, and that was just a cementing end point for me, like, I left basic training, like, I can get along with anybody in this world, no matter what color they are, no matter what ethnicity as long as they are a rational human being.

He did remain alert however, to people who had not made the transitions that he had found to be a better way to exist. Martin explained that one day he was on a detail and left the building without his patrol-cap to make a trash run. "I had nothing on my head. So, I'm like, trying to run back to my company". On his return a White Drill Sergeant from another company stops him and begins to smoke him. They were the only two in the area and Martin said the Drill Sergeant was singing a cadence. Martin demonstrated:

Never forget this. I remember he said he's like [singing] 1-2-3, 1-2-3 then he was like, a disgrace. He said no, he said **YOU'RE** a dis-**GRACE** to your **RACE**. He kept saying that. And in my head, I'm like, damn, this is wrong. So, whatever, I put up with it enough so I could leave, and I went back to the company I knew

that was wrong, and it was like you a low character person to me. So, it was one White Drill Sergeant that was he was really cool with me. And I remember I told him. I mean, I told him what he said. He was like, man, don't even worry about it. You know what I'm saying? He was like, don't worry about it. There's like ignorant people like that. He was like, I know all of us wearing BDU's, he was like but we ain't all good people. I was like, damn, I could have easily went back to what I knew at that point, you know what I'm saying? But him just telling me that he pretty much telling you to keep your head up like, you handled it right. I wanted to stop when he said it, but that was my place. I felt like at that time, you know, I'm saying because I knew if I escalated it, I'm gonna lose. Because it is just gonna be my word against his and I know they ain't taking my word.

His company was mostly Black and when it came down to racism, "there is zero tolerance for that". In his company Martin explained that, "it wasn't that many of them, but it was like, a lot of other races." He said, "I never I never heard of any issues were a fight or disagreement started out and it was race based or anything like that." Martin then describes the type of bond that were created between groups from deployments. He said:

I never heard nobody called by the N word, nobody a cracker, nobody called a chink nobody, called a wet back. If they did, it was they homeys. Now I heard a lot of that, like, you get cool enough. But it will be like, I hear like Mexicans calling other Mexicans wet back even White dudes calling the Mexicans [that] but they were like this. I'm talking about they deployed together they, you know, I'm saying. So, that, it was like that kind of bonds. You don't even like, you may hear it and be like, dang, he just called him that. But then you can see by the way

they interact, okay, this relationship is different. This is not your normal co-worker relationship. But then again, that's not your normal co-worker environment. So, it's gonna create bonds.

*After the military*

Martin became worried that he was being placed back into a cruel world with no protection. He said:

wherever I would go especially moving from a military town into a place, place like this where it ain't a military town. It's like, you know, you just another one, you know what I'm saying? So, I had to get readjusted to hell; to racism being the normal racism that I was used to before I went in. And then I had to readjust to that, and that, that was a little hard because now I'm older. I feel like I'm more established within myself. And so, when it's happening is it a part of me like when I was younger, or it will happen and I'd be like, man, that's part of the game? Part of me that wants to be like, hold on. Why are you doing this? I want to step out and challenge that person. Like, because now, to me, it's deeper than me looking at you as oh, you're racist. I'm looking at you like you're, you're a bad person. Like, your, your fundamental makeup of who you are is jacked up somewhere.

He begins to try to make sense of what he could do to reshape other's perception of his physical being and place worth on his and others quality of life. He explained:

I'm saying like, they're scared, I can tell they're scared, you know, I'm saying, and I don't want anybody to feel like that around me. So, I'll look past the racism aspect of it, you know, to a certain degree and I just start putting a mirror on

myself. Okay, well, what can I do? What can I do? What can I do? What can I do, which is probably wrong, you know what I'm saying, but it's just, I just don't want to, I don't want to rock that boat to a certain degree because it's like, damn like, I'm a Black man again, you know what I'm saying versus I'm a Black soldier. Yes, I'm back on the radar. You know what I'm saying? So I gotta, I gotta navigate this a little different than before when I was, because I'm not 18 no more, you know, the stakes is higher from whereas I didn't have nothing to lose you know, I got stuff to lose, you know, I got a little girl looking at me.

From his experiences through the military and the relationships that he built, he remarks, "I stopped looking at race. And I'm just looking, I mean, I notice it when it's happening. But when I, when I meet somebody, I'm willing to give anybody a shot. Because all I care about is like, what, what are you made of? Like, what's your character?"

#### *Army Core values*

He believes this about the Army core values. "And so, I feel like if people did like adopt that, and they really generally put they heart in it, everything they got into the, Yeah, it will, it will make it wouldn't exist. But you know, we humans, so you know".

He is under the idea that leaders in organizations would use the values to their own benefit. As he is making sense of how people got away with violating the values, he reflects back to his experiences to help make meaning of his logic. He said:

Just blending in. That's it, you know what I'm saying? Just blending in pretending you know what I'm saying because it's only certain situation that's really gonna scratch to the surface and your real, who you really are is going to

show and I think a lot of people they just played a part out in public, you know, understand, but then secretly on the inside, they harbor all these feelings that they know and they're smart enough to know I can't show this right now. You know what I'm saying? So, I'm gonna pick and choose when it's just me and you in the barracks and someone, it could be a situation where he said, or we all posted up somewhere and you notice that now I can be the real me.

He capped his conversation by pointing out that core values are individual and group but definitely an agreed upon thing. He suggested that those in position of authority are the major culprits who control the degree to which values are valued. He said:

It's like a joint effort. You know, I'm saying because you got five or six people that know about this and they know what's wrong, but they'll rather stick to the code or, you know what I'm saying or brotherly code or whatever like that to keep that. I heard about that too many times, you know, domestic abuse, rape, little Bs, especially in the upper ranks, you know, where it happened, you know what I'm saying, instead of kicking him out like we're supposed to, they sweep that under the rug.

*Craig "I don't see racism"*

Craig does not see racism even though he understands that there are institutional and other forms of racism. He believes that racism does not affect him and the generation that he is born into. He spent most of his life in all Black communities. His only connection with other races was during his time in service.

Craig lived in a one parent home raised by his mother. His father was not in his life. “I really never respected my dad. So, today, like, I mean I don't even love my dad, we do communicate”. He has a relationship with his father, but he still looks to his mother for his sole support in the things that he learned in life as a man. “So, my mama she really gave me the basics in life. Like she taught me how to change the tire, how to change the brake pads, cut grass. . .” Teachers and other male community leaders did not factor as role models that he a looked toward for support. Craig stated:

My grandmother was actually the second, and you know my grandma always help us out where my mama couldn't. And those really the two big people that was in my life and my family it was really majority females. The only uncle I did have he died when he was 17 and I was 14 at the time so it was like, after that, it was literally just straight females. Man, me and my little brother so I wasn't surrounded by no male figure in my life I didn't have a male figure to look up to or nothing.

He did hear and have conversations about racism in his home through his Mom and Grandmother. He said:

Okay, well me I personally believe that my mom and grandmother probably got a little racist in them. My mama told me, “if I don't bring a Black girl home, she gonna disown my child”. She straight up told me, and my grandma she's always got something to say about White people this and the third. I pick that up like a round let's say, when I got older and I was around 20, 21. When I was younger, I really didn't pick it up. But I'm not that type of person, like me I don't, skin color means nothing to me. This is how I feel about it but my family they got a whole



different outlook on that type of thing. Like I say, I lived in a strictly black community.

Craig has never dealt with other races or Ethnic groups outside of his all Black community. He said:

I told you my school was 100% minority all my life. I kid you not, 100% minority. It was like 99% black and the rest was Hispanic. So, school it was like to me, the whole administration Black so, it was like I didn't actually deal with my first White person until I got into the military

His social life growing up was in the Black community. He had no relationships outside of that Black community where he was separated by socialization and restricted to his neighborhood and school. "She wasn't one of those type of parents where she just let you roam this and that. It was like me and my sister, we couldn't go nowhere after school". He later went into further details about his mom's restrictions:

Like, light pole to light pole. And that was it. You cannot go, we cannot go around the corner or around a block. We can't go to our friend's house, none of that stuff, like, I actually understand her practice. She actually was fearful cuz you know that was the air you know, Bankhead back in the day really, really wasn't a good area, you know.

### *Working*

Craig's mother bought him a car, "So when she got me my car. It was like she seen I was responsible, obviously because she got me a car so, and I got my first job at Six Flags". That was the only time that he was able to get out into the neighborhood and around his community. He had a job at Six Flags over Georgia but his coworkers and

friends remained all Black. “I only encountered White people and other races in casual conversations while at work. I actually seen or came across White people was, like, you know, you go, go to the malls”. Prior to the military, experiences with race or racism was not something Craig was willing to accept or participate in. His thoughts were:

I have some, some friends who always like to play the race card, you feel me.

They always like to pull the race card in situations. And I have some friends who really don't care who you are. I feel like, I really don't care about the racist things that is going on, and this and that. Like they look at it like okay, my life I never experienced it. So, I mean, I really can't put my input on it because I never experienced it myself. So, it's like, because not every Black person gonna have a racist encounter.

#### *During the military*

In basic training Craig was punctuated into an environment where multiple races and ethnicities were numerous. In the beginning he would attempt to polarize himself. “But I was shy growing up. So, it was like I was hesitant to talk because you know, I only talked to the Black people that was there. I was only talking to the Black people”. When he got to basic training his world changed. He began to interact and meet people from other races. “The first time, like I actually encountered, like, was actually encountering White people... was actually when I went to basic training, my battle buddy was White”. He began to expand his experiences with other races and that he had no problems interacting. Craig explained:

So, it was like from there it just took off. Like he was my first White friend and then I started talking to more White people and then the Puerto Ricans came,

Haitians, you know, different people. So, there's like, it just felt like normal like it just felt right.

Through the meeting of his battle buddy, Craig explained that from his thoughts: I just had the courage to like, you know, we conversing and then like next thing you know it's like oh he's a chill type of guy. And it's crazy, because he had his life stories like mines, but opposite. It was all White people, no Blacks, but I was his first Black [Friend].

Craig did not have a second thought about racism when his battle buddy sabotaged him.

To Craig it was just a bad situation where his battle buddy just simply lied.

He said:

Burger, I will never forget his name. We still talk to this day. Actually, Burger, what led up to that was the night before we actually had to do the math on the worksheet for land nav the next morning. Burger didn't do his. So, we get to land nav and I hand a drill sergeant the paper, and Burger said that's his. I looked at him when he said that and the Drill Sergeant, she asked me, it was a female Drill Sergeant, so she, Drill Sergeant Chance she asks me, Craig, she was like, where's your paper Craig? I was like that is my paper, and she was like, but Burger just said this is his and I'm like Burger lying that's my paper.

Craig never challenges his battle buddy but instead gets into an altercation with An Africa American Drill Sergeant over the incident. "So, I'm about to hit this man with this weapon but I didn't and then the First Sergeant calmed me down". The cost that he paid for the action was punishment even after he had to apologize to the Drill Sergeant "I already got an Article 15 with the Drill Sergeant incident".

Later on, another White soldier would challenge him for unknown reasons knowing that he already had an infraction. Craig said:

I really can't remember why it was, cuz it was something he was saying. We was just in the bay room, and he just kept talking to me, and I forget what he was saying. The next thing you know I got this man up against the lockers like this, and everybody like Craig stop, stop, stop and they are like you can't get in no more trouble, you know, you going to get kicked out and the White boys was trying to go tell the Drill Sergeants. But everybody in the Bay was like naw, you know, I'm not going to go tell, you not gonna snitch on him, especially after you came over here and done started a whole commotion. Cuz me, I don't mess with nobody. He just came to me and was like, was just his mouthing off

These incidents did not fuel any racial twitches in Craig's thoughts are how he sees and perceives racism. To him they were just incidents that occurred.

He does describe an incident that he reports as racism, but the racism was directed on another person. Craig explains:

I wouldn't, I don't know if I call this a racist incident, but can I speak on it? It was a high-ranking officer's daughter, and she was the type of daughter that was getting passed around; basically, she was getting out there. And the officer um, he found out about his daughter. He found out about her and actually caught, caught him, you know, and, and basically, he, the officer, he basically forced his daughter to basically scream rape. And to this day that man still sitting at Fort Leavenworth and he didn't even rape the girl. A White officer. . . She literally [with] every almost every dude in a barracks and he was just the one that just got

caught by the officer. That part I'm not, it was always sure about her age, but I know she was over 18 she was legal. So, I don't know she was 20 or 21.

### *After the Military*

Transitioning from the military Craig remained in his last duty station in the Northwest. He finally decided to move back to his hometown and returned to a situation where Blackness was the predominant socialization within his daily life. Although he maintains close ties to acquaintances in the military, he understands that racism plays a part in his daily and social life.

Craig described the scene and workplace within a warehouse environment that he experienced, He said:

It was Black but the people who was like up, up was White people, you know, that's like really how life is. Like the manager that you know your immediate supervisor the manager was all Black. Literally all of them was Black and then when the people come in with polo and suits, khaki's and belts you know the GM top managers, all White. And the people that I work with majority Black. . . come to think of it I don't recall that I have seen any White people workers. . . yeah in the warehouse. All the people there was, there was working it was Black. Even in my own training class. It was just Black people in there.

Craig's only real conversations about racism after the military was with the White owner of a company. Craig was a delivery driver for the owner. He said:

Both my managers were White, two old White men. I, we sat down and have a conversation. My manager, because he would ride to a job about two hours away and I had to deliver windows. . . and we, we was in the truck driving and on the

radio, they start saying something about President Trump. You know, he started talking about on his take, his input on, he basically a Trump supporter. But in a way he was, he actually opened my eyes and all Trump supporters; not races they really aren't. In my mind, he was far from a racist, he was far from the racist, but he supported Trump. He was like, yeah, like ever since Trump got elected, I made more money with my company. So, I guess whatever Trump did, affected his company, so that's why he was a Trump supporter.

Craig remarks that the only conversations that he has had, "I never really had these conversations face to face. My old manager he was like, really, the first person I actually talked to face to face out of the military when it came to like politics." He continued to move forward with his narrative about his manager, Craig narrates that:

He's [the manager] saying like, how Blacks, how it basically was. Like I'm not racist, you know, calling people niggers. So, he's like, he never condone none of that stuff, but he did say he have friends that did those type of things and stuff. He was like he never befriended them. He was still friends with them, but he never took part in you know, with the racist stuff. He was like, that wasn't him, but he never turned, it wasn't like he'll turn his butt cheek to it. Never say it didn't happen. He know that it happened, but it's like he just never took part in it.

### *Army Corps Values*

Craig believes that Army Core Values are very important not only in his individual daily life but that it could be expanded to leaders and business organizations as a useful tool to train people. Craig said that having Army Core Values or a system of values helps build integrity and dignity. "I don't think you can fulfill the army core

values if you are racist. Like, I honestly don't think you'll probably be a leader to people". He continues his conversation with, "you can't, you can't fulfill every Army Core Value if you are racist, if you have, if you're being discriminatory towards another race, how can, how are you fulfilling the core values".

He believes that the world would be a better place if core values like in the military were taught in school. He said:

If core values is incorporated into like high school organizations and this and that just met actually taught and not try to get bent turn twist or this and that; the world would be a better place. I honestly think like the last of breed of the 1930 40, 50's; once they die off, I honestly think the world will be a better place.

He also believes that some people are stuck in their beliefs and unwilling to change. He said:

Just because they transformed from a civilian to a Soldier it doesn't mean that you're going to forget things that you was taught or caught on before you came into the military.

So, it's like if people grew up with their racist mindset and if they grew up with a racist mindset and not trying to be open minded, they're going to continue to be that way and it is going to transfer over to the military. And I mean, I hope that they can find somebody in the military to help them break that, break that away from them for being racist because I have seen, I have encountered White people who said, you know, growing up, they was racist. They didn't like Black people, but they got in the Army, and they best friend is Black now. Because being with this guy, always talking to you, and they've been in the field with him every day.

You talking to them, and like, I don't even see how I was a racist in the first place. Like, I've heard a White person say it before.

*Katie: "Integrity is everything"*

Katie grew up in New York and came to the south as an adult. Prior to the military, while living in the north, her family did have conversations about race and racism. "You know, we were taught by my mom, my brothers that racism did exist in the world, we were talking about how things were in the past." Although her background was diverse, racism was still a social, political, educational, and economic reality. She explains:

As far as Black people trying to live amongst, you know, White people, or in a society where Black people were basically not able to achieve, because society pretty much kept us from achievement and certain level, as far as education. As far as, you know, going to some schools and as far as getting certain jobs and things like that. So, my family was very adamant about me and my brothers knowing that it did exist. And we might have certain issues going on in the world, dealing with the fact that we were people of color. But we were never taught to be racist. We're never taught to be discriminated you know to discriminate. And my mom was running into history, Black history, and history itself so she taught us a lot of things about like where we came from, and where our name came from, and, you know, is this is from the south in the north. So, you know, we were really educated about what the separation of colorism was. But like I said, I can't believe we didn't experience it too much because of where I lived was so diverse.



The neighborhoods and educational setting that she experienced was diverse and accommodating to the culture of the area that she lived. She said, “so, we had White people, we are Black people, we have people from Vietnam, you know, we have people from everywhere, parts of Africa, parts of Russia. So, we have people from everywhere so we kind of collaborated”.

Even in school there was no pressure, that she experienced, stemming from racism. “I don't know if that has to do with the school system in the north, as a whole, because of all the diversity we didn't really experience too much on the colorism situation”. That was in the area where she lived.

Traveling through the city things were notably different from her perceptions.

Katie comments:

Well, I mean, like I said, the neighborhood that I grew up in, was very diverse. So pretty much all of us had the same mentality. Like, we, a lot of us we noticed that. If you go like, you go down a hill. . . now, the world changed, you know, we noticed a difference in our neighborhood in our neighborhoods. It was like you know it's different. You know those areas; you didn't really frequently go there or you going to get something specific and then leave. It wouldn't be, it wouldn't be an area that you would stay in because of the possibility of there being some racism being, you know administered towards you, in some kind of way.

Katie experiences in the work force demonstrated how she viewed the dynamics of fairness towards minorities. Katie said:

When I started working. I would say that I, I noticed it. I saw it. And the people on a high echelon of course I saw that it was mostly Caucasian, Caucasian men at

the top. And then the people that were underneath at my level. They might have had some Black people some of them was is a supervisor positions whatever, but I didn't see too many who excel to a higher position. But that didn't discourage me, you know, that didn't bother me, but I did see it, I did see, you know, just the differences of the scales of how you know people's positions at work.

*During the military*

During Katie's military service she saw the differences in the achievement of Blacks while in a unit that was diverse. She also saw how Whiteness could be a tool to discriminate between the most qualified people. She reflects on two experiences in two different units:

Unit 1: In my first unit, it was mostly mixed mostly White you know...She got a promotion over a couple other women that supposed to get promoted, that were woman of color. They was in the unit before her, you know. They had more time in grade and stuff, but she got the position, and is like you can just feel the tension in the unit as a whole because everybody realized that, that was not, you know, a good thing. That was something that was put in place that wasn't supposed to happen, you know, and that the rest of the other people that was overlooked, like, you can tell they felt like they were discriminated against.

Unit 2: In my unit my company, it was like, predominantly Black males and females, a lot of females, a lot of officers. So, and we also had a huge unusual amount of E4s. And, like, even grown people that were just like, E4's, because they never got the chance to move up in other places that they had been prior to coming to my unit. And that was the good thing about my company that our unit

is that people did get promoted. They wanted to push promotion, like that was the one of their core values like we don't intend for you to stay like an E anything really, you know. I'm saying we expect you to excel. So, I saw a lot of my friends and everybody excel and go to high positions and go from like Captains, you know, Major, to Commanders, you know. You know, we had, it wasn't too many but we had two Master Sergeants, one was a female, and she had been in it for a long time, so she like, she taught us a lot because she had been active duty for years.

*After military*

Katie's altercation demonstrated the way people viewed people of color military service. Katie explained:

He was like being very rude and disrespectful. And me and him got into argument, and he was like, he was going to call the police. I was like I don't care, I'm a veteran. He was like, you're in the military? Like, I can't believe it. . . . Like a lot of other people Black and White in the supermarket just watching. And then, like there was one Black guy just constantly stood next to me. . . before I left, I told him, I said that's why Obama is going to win. Okay, you saw him turn like this super red, and everybody was looking.

She also challenges the concept of jobs and workforces claiming to be military friendly. She said:

Well the first thing would be actually finding a job. That's one of the things that I think is a misperception too because, these jobs say that they're military friendly, but you fill out the applications you put down you military or la, la, la, la, and

then they tell you either you under qualified, or they don't have you know I'm saying they can't afford to pay you or there's no position available. And it's like, but I thought you were veteran friendly and if I meet the requirements, why not hire me.

Leaving the military severs the bonds that servicemembers become accustomed. “You can bump into somebody from the military, and it's like automatic kinship. So, it's like hey, I just made this connection that you don't make with people on an everyday basis”.

#### *Army core values*

Katie believes that values help keep people in an equal status, but dominant group thinking is what drives people to act contrary. “Some people I believe got away with it because they were friends with people in some positions”. Her thoughts were that values provides transparency in peoples actions in integrity. She said:

Even if you don't really want to do it, the 30 people you walking [with] right now, is doing it. So, you gotta perform. You know what I mean, so I think that, that will pull out the people who are really not worthy of certain positions or, or whatever are not going to be serious workers or employees that will help them to be identified so that the strong people remain the core of the organization. And there'll be more progress. Integrity is everything. Because if you don't stand for anything you really nothing you know what I mean, so being truthful being honest. You know, people can count on you, you know what I'm saying. They know that you're a stand-up person I think that means everything.

### *Summary*

None of the eight participants served together while in the military and do not have any significant relationships with one another while attending college. The re-stories are the transcribed voices of the participants lived experiences of their realities of racism. Their accounts about racism came forward as a result of the research questions conducted through three interviews.

The re-stories are constructed to have a beginning, middle, and end to allow for themes to emerge. Each narrative kept CRT at the center of the conversation. The results from those conversations were eight thick and rich vignettes filled with data that helped to answer the research question. The combined voices offer the historical accounts of social, political, economic, and educational realities about racism from this purposeful sample.

## Chapter V

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

#### Introduction

The open-end narratives using semi-structured questions produced rich descriptive data. The interview process, using Seidman's (2013) three 90-minute interviews, help to highlighted social, economic, political, and educational periods in the experiences of eight participants. Protecting the identity of the participants by using pseudonyms was necessary. Only basic information about the participant's demographics remain attached to this study. The participants in this study addressed four research questions:

RQ 1. How did recently separated African American U.S. Army service members perceive race prior to military service?

RQ 2. What factors may have influenced the recently separated U.S. Army service member's perception of race while on active duty?

RQ 3. How did the recently separated U.S. Army service members make sense of acts of racism after serving in the military?

RQ4. How did the U.S. Army's core values shape your understanding of Racism After military service?

Critical Race Theory guided the conversations with each participant and each interview. Maintaining the focus on experiences with racism while using a CRT frame allowed the participants' individual voices to emerge. The narrative inquiry approach

allowed their experiences to come forward through mini re-stories during various stages of their life that connected with relevant social, political, economic, and educational historical facts. Their individual re-story provided meaning to the significance of their personal experience. The results using a CRT lens produced significant revelations and framed their experiences and perceptions about racism.

Analyzing the narratives using Saldaña's (2016) narrative coding and Patterson (2008) six-part Labovian model also produced sub-themes under each major theme that allowed the researcher to weave the participants' narratives into meaning. Codeweaving is a process of fitting the pieces in narrative inquiries together like a puzzle (Saldaña, 2016). Kim (2016) described codeweaving as narrative linkages. Lightfoot and Davis (1997) point out that weaving of narratives is the process of triangulating the re-stories to extract the themes or codes. The outcomes from the analysis produced what Daiute (2014) calls "scripts" or interrelated themes from different participants.

During the analysis process the researcher listened to the interviews and wrote memos to ensure understanding of the context of each interview. The memos allowed the researcher to clearly hear each individual voice and frame the stories appropriately to CRT. Maxwell (2013) informs that there is no "cookbook" to data analysis in qualitative research. Part of the coding strategy that the researcher used was to extract the important pieces that aligned with CRT and the purpose of the study.

The purpose for this was to account for the parts of the participants' re-story that did not specifically answer the research question but were pieces that were necessary in understanding the experience of the participant's perceptions of their individual reality. (Maxwell, 2013) referred to this coding method as "open coding". Organizing the

descriptive data using these analytical approaches yielded the findings along the themes (1) Premilitary racial bubble, (2) In-service game changers of racism, (3) Post military polarization, (4) The overt and covert nature of racism, (5) Challenging core values. They provide what Delgado and Stefancic (2002) described under the tenets of CRT as the unique color of voice.

### Premilitary Cultural Bubble

A major cultural artifact rich in data that each participant shared from their experiences derived from their cultural and physical geographical existence. The participants did not necessarily assign a physical space to racism. All eight participants, however, describe the social, political, economic, or educational tenets of CRT that bind institutional racism to the restricted boundaries and realities within their individual bubble.

Mike said, “When you in Oklahoma you're in a bubble, you know [what] I mean? And they do a very good job at keeping you in a bubble”. Martin describes it as “you're just in your own bubble in your own world”. Melinda said, “We just stayed in our area and, you know, it was like avoidance, it is what it is”.

Tammy, Anthony, Craig, Katie, and Kelvin also described the bubble in terms of area. Tammy said, “and everything was majority African American over there in the area. And we stayed in an area [the] majority of our life, from the time I was born up until the time I left to go to the military”.

Anthony stated, “So, some teachers have assumed I was a bad kid, but I wasn't, they just assume because I came from that area.” Katie pointed out that “those areas, you didn't really frequently go there or you going to get something specific and then leave.”



Craig noted that “she actually was fearful cuz you know that was the area you know... back in the day really, really wasn't a good area, you know”. Therefore, Craigs childhood geographical proximity was, “like light pole to light pole. And that was it. You cannot go; we cannot go around the corner around a block”.

Within this bubble, institutional racism is prevalent in the total experiences of each participant. The bubble represents what Mallach (2018) and Dillon (2007) describe as the generational creation of marginalized African American communities. Anderson (2016) and Mallach (2018) offers that the bubble(s) stem from a historical lens and is the residual outcomes from the separation of African Americans class structure produced in the American culture during the Civil Rights movement.

Within this bubble, the participants describe the presents of the female head of household and how eviction and homelessness is a coauthor of institutional racism. Their unique voice provides data about experiences in polarized school systems. Last, their re-stories demonstrate the reality of how crime is a fixture within the bubble.

#### *Female Head of Household*

Five of the participants came from a single-parent home. Anthony and Martin lived with one or the other parent. Kelvin had both parents present, and Katie did not specify if both parents were in the home but shared that her mother and brother were her influences. Margo (2004) and Mallach (2018) have documented how the single female presents in the home created certain qualities about racism and the participant's sense of self.

Margo (2004) continues with the CRT thinking that social, political, economic, and educational factors are at play that holds the African American family hostage. For

example, Martin lived from time to time between both parents. His mother was Hispanic, and Martin distinguishes between his two parents by stating:

I feel like she had this preconceived notion like okay, this because we were already staying in a poor neighborhood so it was like, if we're in a poor neighborhood, these kids gotta be up to no good and they gotta be like doing drugs, gangs, stuff like this.

Martin's dad was the opposite "I didn't see that at all in my dad to a certain degree, he had friends of all races and they all will come over". Craig however, indicated that he did not respect his dad and that his mother and grandmother were the leading figures during his adolescence. Other participants' experiences revealed a longing for a protector in the absence of a male presence in the home.

### *Searching for a Protector*

The correlation of institutional racism and the effects on the absences of a male authority figure is threaded in their experiences as they discussed this phenomenon. Anderson (2016) and Alexander (2010) assert that the decline in the presence of the African American male in the family has created generational disparities in the African American communities and families that are not remarkable in other races family structures.

Delgado and Stefancic (2002) pointed out that under the CRT ideology that the absence of the Black male presents the idea of normalcy and becomes historically correct. Melinda's experiences and the need for a protector is persistent through her re-story. She begins with, "My dad escaped town, so he was one of those types." Melinda points out that her boyfriend was subject to the "one of those types," she said, "He was protective

up until the point when I left to go to college. The coda for Melinda was to introduce her protector. “When my son was about one years old, one year old, and he was one of my high school classmates. And he came in like this knight in shining armor”.

Mike supports that argument by stating, “You have no protection. So, you have to figure out how to survive as a woman with three children in the ghetto”. Anthony and Craig both have a female who represents the lead protector. Anthony said, “If anything, I had my two sisters to protect me.” Craig pointed out that his mother and grandmother were his “influences.” Tammy pointed that her father, “he wasn't too much in my life he was, but he was, it was kind of like a in and out, or I call thing, but I'll come, come get you. Never come get me like; that type of situation”. Lack of a protector or result of the protector being a female may have led to the avoidance within the family discussions about racism or awareness of the participants racial circumstances.

#### *Avoiding the discussion*

When asked the guiding question: What was the discussions about racism that you and your family and friends have before military service? Katie and Tammy were the only participants that had discussions about racism or Black versus White cultural awareness. Katie said, “You know, we were taught by my mom, my brothers and I that racism did exist in the world”.

Tammy's home discussion about racism with her mother resulted from a family experience whereby law enforcement accosted her brother and used racist remarks toward her brother. Tammy explained:

And my mom was telling my younger brother, like this is the society we live in, like, you know about what happened back in the day with the slavery and how the

Whites didn't like the Blacks, and she would just let him know that it still goes on till this day, and you just have to be careful of how you go about things because of the color of your skin.

Kelvin said that “It wasn't really much of a talk about race. . . it seems like racism was kind of understood doesn't need to be explained type of issue”. Martin said that his mom and him, “We never really had any explicit conversations where we would say like oh, them or anything like that it was just more implied.” The other participants did not discuss racism as a family. Craig, for example, said, “I'm not that type of person, like me; I don't, skin color means nothing to me. Melinda shared the same thoughts and said, “I never really saw color.” Anthony and Mike avoided the question by providing other experiences and did not address whether discussions about racism happened in their homes.

### *Eviction & Homelessness*

Another subtheme from the combined experiences was the experience of eviction and homelessness that Tammy, Martin, Anthony, Melinda, and Kelvin directly experienced. Tammy pointed out that:

Back in my younger days, we stayed in public housing, and my mom she was on Section 8. So, it was times we had to; I know this time we got evicted, it was times we had to move into apartments with no furniture.

Mallach (2018) and Dillon (2007) suggest that this type of dilemma represent generational victimization, where generations of African Americans find it difficult to move into a different bubble. Wetts & Willer (2018) pointed out that there is a stigma in

the US by White Americans when African Americans rely on welfare and government assistance.

Melinda's spent a considerable amount of her youth moving, living with friends, and in and out of shelters. "My senior year high school, we ended up getting evicted". She had to cope with many other factors when she pointed out, "I ended up being molested in foster care." In another experience of Melinda's was a time she left college because she was pregnant. Having no other choice but to call her mother, Melinda explains the results. "Well, I call my mom and tell her what happened. And the first thing out of her mouth when she gets there to help me load up my stuff is where do you want me to drop you off at".

For Martin, his homelessness challenges the stereotypes that were associated with being Black and living in his assigned bubble. According to Alexander (2010), Martin was subject to the assumption of criminality and lived within that spectrum. Martin's thoughts were to purposefully commit a crime so that, as he said, "if I at least if I go to jail or go to prison, and my basic needs are met." He could not see past the horrid conditions of his bubble, and instead, he was willing to cope with as he explained, "I guess I could wrap my head around, you know, just losing my freedom, but it just felt hopeless like that to me. . . I don't got to worry about, you know what I'm saying, what I'm going to; where I'm going to sleep at night".

Anthony added that being homeless that you "figure out how to survive," and that you "get use to moving." Kelvin said in his experience about being homeless. "I'd say about four or five months slept in my car, friends' floors, buddies that was still in the service just looking out for me until I figured out what I was going to do". The

participants' lives begin to share similar realities within their bubbles when they talked about basic sheltering needs. Their narratives did not stray too far as they discussed education.

### *Polarized Schools*

Five participants noticed differences in the schools that they attended during their premilitary experiences. Many scholars raise the point that the economic disparities in communities produce a condition of white flight from areas and strips economic resources like education (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 2016; Desmond, 2016; Leovy, 2015; Solomon & Rankin, 2019). As African Americans set out to follow the better resources, acts of racism in structural racism becomes apparent.

Kelvin was raised in a military family and moved around due to the military lifestyle. The schools within the military community were diverse. Kevin said, "Especially with me, traveling from different place to place. Throughout the different grades, I was exposed to different sports, a lot of different kids". Mike had a different experience from the schools in his bubble. Mike said:

The only difference that you really noticed is that you go from a White school into a Black school so you can see at a White school you can, there's a lot of programs.

Tammy noticed a similar pattern. From her experience, she said that in the Black school, "teachers really didn't care, but they care, but like they care to pass you like they weren't really making sure we was getting what you needed". She felt that she had a better experience when, because of Section 8 housing, she was in a predominately White school. Tammy stated,

It was kinda in a high-class area. So, you could kind of tell the teachers were pretty much like questioned you, they kind of knew if you knew what you were doing or not and if you had questions they wasn't trying to like down talk to you or make you seem like it was stupid.

Craig went to all-Black schools and had no comparison to his educational experiences. Anthony, however, had two different experiences when he went to live with his father for a time. He felt that he was labeled “a bad kid” because of where he lived. Anthony expresses that everyone made a distinction of who you are from the bubble where you lived. He expressed his thoughts by stating that:

A couple of teachers asked what school did you come from, and I told them. It was, oh you came from district seven, which a lot of people know District Seven is where mostly, most of the Black kids go to.

Katie, who grew up in the north, had similar experiences as Kelvin. Katie commented that “I don't know if that has to do with the school system in the north, as a whole, because of all the diversity we didn't really experience too much on the colorism situation.”

Melinda did not remark on any distinctions that she experienced during K-12 school. She focused on the White faculty member who drove over two hours to teach a predominately Black cosmetology class. From Melinda's experience, the class had to show the Instructor things about Black hair which points to the CRT of the voice of color:

She had to travel a little way to get there, and we was wondering why they didn't get anybody local, and in walks this Caucasian lady. Of course, the way they do

hair is totally different from the way we do hair. And we had to teach her some stuff.

### *Crime*

Crime within the bubble came forth through various forms, including acts of racism and institutional racism. Tammy, Martin, Anthony, and Mike all presented experiences of stereotyping and profiling. Martin's encounter, on one occasion, resulted in the police pulling over him and a group of Black teenagers. The probable cause for the stop was that the police feared that they had a weapon. Leovy (2015) discussed how policing in areas are different and purposeful in low-income minority communities than they are in similar low income predominately White communities.

The ideology of the 'stop and frisk' movement is an example of the reality of this experience. Mike, while coming from lunch and wearing a maintenance uniform, was stopped by the police coming out of a fast-food parking lot. Mike stated this about his experience, "he come up and, you know, he's like you got any guns or drugs in the car"?

Anthony framed the crime between the two bubbles by observing that living with his father, the crime rate was low, but living with his mother was a constant, "It was more of you had to be on your toes. The crime rate was higher compared to staying with my dad and the crime rate was very low".

Melinda was part of the stereotype, "for the most part...I hung out with the boys in the hood, cuz they had little different little groups that was out there. Of course, they had gangs, and I would hang out".

Tammy experienced crime through her living situation. "So, the people who the house that we were moving into there was like their first time ever renting to a Section 8



person, so I guess like once they heard the stories and stuff.” She also lived through the experience of her brother. Tammy said, “I have a brother who’s a Black male, and he got into an incident with the police, and it was like the police was saying racial slurs and whatever to him.”

The bubble can be any community and linked to any economic, social, political, and educational reality. The experiences that the African American enlisted service members in this study shared before serving in the military were similar. Weaving their re-stories supports the tenets of CRT that Delgado and Stefancic (2002) proposed and how institutional racism connects within their social, political, economic, and educational re-stories. Their experiences with racism changed as they transferred out from their premilitary bubble.

#### In-service Game Changers of Racism

The single event that all participants experienced was volunteering to serve in the U.S. Army. From this nexus, institutional racism became an anomaly due to the in-service game changers that each participant experienced. The nexus for each participant became their validation for identifying racism. Each participant experienced the nexus of Basic and Advance Individual Training reprogramming, a balanced workforce, and first duty station politics.

#### *Basic and Advanced Preprogramming*

Each participant volunteered for the military, and their first challenge for entry was to go through Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training (AIT). Anthony, Martin, and Mike entered Basic Training with preconceptions. Anthony said, “We had kids that was, that was racist towards Black people because they think Black people the,

the only thing we can do is Infantry”. From Anthony’s reality he trained with only three other African Americans out of 40 recruits. His Platoon Sergeants admonition for him and the other African Americans to “just quit, just go home,” and for the White recruits to “Come on man you got it,” confirmed that racism was an issue.

Mike and Martin carried their experiences from their bubbles with them to basic training and applied their tough exterior to their experiences. Mike challenged a group of White soldiers when he overheard them complaining about the African American soldiers. Craig thought that he needed to be the toughest guy in the room and was extremely aggressive with the White soldiers.

### *Sameness*

Martin soon began to feel the effects of the Army’s strategy of sameness as he had become social within his new bubble. As mentioned before the military culturally bases its ideology on values and cooperative norms and behaviors where each service uniquely values their brand of fraternal overtones through the sharing of language, symbols, and experiences (McNamara, 2018; Moore, 2010; Moskos & Butler, 1996; Soeters et al., 2003).

Because everyone was held to the same standards Martin said, “I was, I wasn't seeing color to a certain extent all I'm seeing is BDUs you know what I'm saying”. He continued to explain, “The only difference is their skin color and maybe the situation they born into, you know, but it's literally the same as me”. Craig’s experience changed drastically where for the first time he was not subject to an entirely African American culture. He said, “like he was my first White friend and then I started talking to more

White people and then the Puerto Ricans came, Haitians, you know, different people. So, there's like, it just felt like normal like it just felt right.”

### *Permanent Party Politics*

Each participant perceptions of fairness and equality shifted due to some form of Permanent Party Politics. The participants experienced the CRT idea presented by Delgado and Stefancic (2002) of interest convergence, the practice of White over Black serves a purpose. The participants experienced this in the form of a White Pyramid or White over Black serves a purpose leadership structure through military social-political domination. The color of equality were factors that came forward and shifted their sense of fairness and perceptions of institutional racism. Each participant made some hard choices because of the racism that fueled leaders’ actions and decisions.

During Basic and AIT the participants with the exception of Anthony and Tammy, witnessed a balanced work force. Leadership that mattered in the daily lives of the participants was present and maintained standards through military policy. Melinda’s perception of being treated unfairly when she wished to see her husband during AIT was corrected from her lens when the protector, the Senior Enlisted Advisor corrected a White subordinate’s decision. “But the Sergeant Major stepped in, and he cleared it up because he felt like she was being hard on me. Mike shared that “I don't think the racism isn’t as blatant there...most of the people in leadership positions are people of some color”. The balances in leadership, values, and sense of fairness left Martin with, “I left basic training, like, I can get along with anybody in this world, no matter what color they are, no matter what ethnicity as long as they are rational human being”.

A significant game changer for some of the participants was their Battle Buddy. Martin described his Battle Buddy and their relationship. “I remember my Battle Buddy was a Greek White boy, you know what I’m saying, from Florida. And, but over time he got close to me. . . my closest homeboys because we all we had”. Craig’s life was predominately African American experiences. His Battle Buddy was a contrasting look in the mirror. Craig said, “he’s a chill type of guy and it's crazy because he had his life stories like mines but opposite”. Anthony’s Battle Buddy was White, and he was invited to spend Family Day with them because his Battle Buddy’s family could not be there.

The Battle Buddy experiences were factors that challenged their premilitary perception of racism through personal relationships. When the participants shared their realities with people outside of their race boundaries, their perspectives of other races shifted from general expected feelings about other people to a personal experience. Having shared a close connection with a Battle Buddy impacted the participants overall view on racism.

*The Strength of the White Pyramid (White over Black Serves a Purpose)*

During Tammy’s second duty station, her entire leadership structure was White except for one Black supervisor who was eventually forced out of the military. The company’s four African Americans were in the same platoon and felt the racial tension in the company even after the incident was reported. Tammy eventually decided to not re-enlist. Tammy said:

The Commander he was one of those. He was like, I don’t want to call him a jerk but, he was like, whatever the XO or the First Sergeant said, he went with. They was just, they was like, they was all in cahoots together in fact they was trying to

get me out of there for whatever reason. And, before I got out, my Sergeant, they kicked him out.

Melinda brought forward a claim of sexual harassment against a Senior White military leader. The entire white leadership that was charged to handle the incident was subordinate to the Lieutenant Colonel (LTC). Even after Melinda was reassigned to another unit the LTC had friends that created a residual carryover to the new duty station. The White leadership from the Officer and NCO Support System fueled a perceived racial overtone in the incident. The challenges to her duty performance was persistent. Melinda said, "So, when [new African American leadership] came along a lot of stuff changed at that unit." Nevertheless, Melinda was forced to accept a medical separation in lieu of being forcefully separated.

Mike experienced a predominantly White Chain of Command. The exception was his Company Commander who was new. The prior Commander was White. His perception was that he was being targeted for being "outspoken" against racist acts and comments. He felt that the Commander could do more to correct the situation other than just bringing in an Enlisted Equal Opportunity Officer. From Mike's lens the Commander was afraid to challenge the First Sergeant's White Pyramid.

Katie distinguished between two different types of units where opportunity for African Americans was different when there was an African American command team. Katie shared:

In my first unit, it was mostly mixed mostly White you know. . . she got a promotion over a couple other women that supposed to get promoted that were woman of color. They

was in the unit before her, you know. They had more time in grade and stuff, but she got the position.

The second unit that Katie describe was African American leadership and the opportunities and fairness in reward and promotion was based on merit and was fair.

The White Pyramid but more popular White privilege has been a structural and institutional fixture in the American culture for centuries (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Ellison, 1992; Moskos & Butler 1996; Webb & Herrmann, 2002). The White Pyramid covers each tenet of CRT theories presented by Delgado and Stefancic (2002). Loggins (2016), Downing (2012) and Mencke (2010) indicated that institutional racism and acts of racism are problematic where there is little diversity within a command in the U.S. Army.

#### *Military Social Political Domination*

Kelvin was not offered special assignments due to the social political domination within his unit. Because he was not one of the “in group” he was left out of opportunities. That led to poor performance ratings and he left the military to avoid being forced to leave. Melinda did not get the support that she needed due to a peer that could have been a witness to fraternization by her NCO support channel. The person refused to be a witness. Melinda explained, “And I asked that person and they say they would rather not. So, he said I'm not saying it's, its right, he said, but I'm, I'm on the inside”. Anthony talked about the experience that he had with the only Black Platoon Sergeant in the company. His Platoon Sergeant had complaints against him from other White NCOs and “was in the same boat” as the other three African American soldiers.

Mike's Company Commander's perceived unwillingness to have a conversation with the Black enlisted soldiers during a time of racial tension describes the social political stance that Black Officers take and not willing to cross into the enlisted barriers. When Martin was in a predominantly Black unit "there is zero tolerance for that". He did point out that in smaller polarized groups of people, racial comments did happen. Martin said, "So, that, it was like that kind of bond. You don't even like, you may hear it and be like, dang, he just called him that. But then you can see by the way they interact, okay, this relationship is different".

### *The Color of Equality*

The participants' stories demonstrated that when African Americans are involved in the decision-making process equality and opportunity was present. Anthony felt that the only reason that he was promoted, in his own words:

[this duty station] was heavy on racial issues, because if, if you didn't have a...if you didn't have a ranger tab and you were Black, then you wasn't gettin promoted, unless you really like kiss somebody butt. I got promoted, only because I had a Black Platoon Sergeant. I'm pretty sure if I didn't have him, I wouldn't have got promoted

Melinda's re-story revealed in two separate incidents that fairness was a result when her Sergeant Major intervened. Katie showed how an organization whose leadership was African American ensured that qualified African Americans were permitted a chance to excel. Anthony, Martin, and Craig offered experiences that showed that a diverse cadre in Basic and AIT can offer a sense of possibility and opportunity for African Americans to look beyond their current bubbles. Martin stated:

The only difference is their skin color and maybe [the] situation they born into, you know, but it's literally the same as me. And so, you know, I carry that I carry that with me to AIT. By the time I got it I softened my stance a little. I didn't have to be the hardest person in the room. I wasn't even worried about that.

Although the participants experienced acts of racism while in the military, many of them perceived their time-in-service as game changers. The Basic and AIT strategies fully implemented and introduced the Army's Core Values to the participants' personal values before military service. The participants were forced to accommodate a Battle Buddy without any preassessments and gained an experience from the practice especially when the Battle Buddy was White.

Another game changer was the White pyramid and social political domination embedded in the military. The participants gage their decisions and behaviors based on the policy and the Army Core Value that they had been taught as acceptable behavior. Some of the experiences localized their ideology of fairness and the color of equality was wherever diversity was present.

#### Post Military Polarization

Social-economic factors were either forced or planned choices for post military education, employment, and family residence. The participants' choices to leave the military were punctuated where their thoughts and futures was contingent on the Post 9/11 GI Bill. A bad conduct discharge would forfeit any educational benefits. From a CRT frame there were factors at play that have been historically significant for African American service members military status for decades.



The wealth and employment gaps in the American work force has shown no changes since WWII (Margo, 2004; Quillian et al., 2017). There is well documented evidence that re-adjustment from the military is socially, political, and economically difficult for African Americans (Bynum et al., 2007; Margo 2004). Securing meaningful employment commensurate to the skills in many areas of the US can be a problem (Davis & Minnis, 2016; Rose, et al., 2017).

Racism contributed to their reasons for separating from the U.S. Army while serving under a predominantly White leadership team. All eight participants returned to predominately African American communities after serving in the military. They all attended a predominately African American college in a community that offers a host of traditional and nontraditional adult learning environments. They made post military choices from a social-economic position.

#### *Socio-Economic Forced decisions*

After Tammy separated from the military, she returned to her hometown with her two children. Tammy lives in a predominately White neighborhood but limits her social contact to an African American community of friends. She lived with her mother in a Black community before she was able to get an apartment in a predominately White neighborhood. Her experiences while in the military provided the opportunity to work with and develop friends with White people. After her military experiences, she sees many of her White neighbors, as “overly nice.”

I stay in a predominately White neighborhood, but you have a small percentage of African Americans. White people there are so; they're like overly nice like, they're really nice. So you can tell it, you can tell when somebody when they

faking or you just kind of you tell that, it's just like they're just smiling and thank you and after every little thing or, I don't I don't know how to explain is just overly nice.

According to Bonilla-Silva (2015) and Solórzano, et al. (2000), microaggression as an everyday form of racism has replaced the blatant public forms of acts of racism with the subtle micro-aggressive form of racism towards people of color. Tammy sees racism in her local community but remains silent through her situations. In one incident, a cashier would place their change on the counter. When Tammy investigated, she notices that the same cashier would place change directly in the hands of the White customers but not in any Black customer's hands.

Tammy is raising two children with no other parental support. She moved in with her mom directly after separating from the military and finally secured an apartment so that her kids were in the better school district. Her choice for her bubble was based on the use of her Post 9/11 Veterans Education benefits, housing choice voucher, and some part-time work while attending college.

Melinda separated from the military for medical reasons. She made a choice not to return to her hometown in Mississippi because "nothing has changed". Melinda lives in an all-Black community, and her daughter attends a predominately Black K-12 institution. She had to discuss with her. "She was shell shocked when we got here to Georgia and I, you know, try to explain to her mom is getting ready to leave the Army. I'm retiring and had to explain what all that meant to her". Her daughter's social experiences derived from the perspective of the diversity in the military community. "The school and girl scout troop that she is in, the one she's in now is all Black. So, and

she hated it at first". Melinda is also raising her daughter as a single parent and attending college. She does not socialize too often but maintains friendships with former military acquaintances.

Anthony said that his transition from the military was "hard," and he took about six months to adjust to being out of the military. He lives in Atlanta with his wife in a Black community. His wife attends the same college as he does, and she discusses racism "every day." He relocated to his area because his wife and her family lived in the area.

Craig and Anthony are the opposite. He stayed in the Pacific Northwest for several months before moving back to Atlanta, Georgia. Craig transitioned from military cook to truck driver. He returned to his predominately African American culture. The only person that he has discussed racism with was his White manager. Craig said, "I never really had these conversations face to face. My old Manager, he was like really the first person I actually talked to face to face out of the military when it came to like politics." During those conversations while traveling as a truck driver, Craig's manager discussed his politics and his experiences with racism. The concept of colorblindness escapes both Craig and the manager. Colorblindness is a form of microaggression that misleads people's perceptions of the realities of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Craig said:

He's [the manager] saying like how Blacks, how it basically was. Like I'm not racist, you know, calling people niggers, so he's like, he never condoned none of that stuff, but he did say he have friends that did those type of things and stuff. He was like he never befriended them. He was still friends with them.

Martin, Kelvin, and Mike both moved to their present bubbles from another city. Mike was looking to start his own business in Atlanta, Georgia. Kelvin was looking to find ways to support himself while changing careers and was forced to choose to live with family in the area or remain homeless. “I never received an offer for a job in that area, which was kind of odd but not surprising, dealing with the fact of the demographics I was living in regardless if I was in the service and just got out or not.”

Martin moved from one situation looking to attend one college after another. He was not serious about college, but after his family was fractured, he decided to settle down. Eventually, he opted to remain near his daughter in Atlanta, Georgia. Martin explained that he had to accept the idea that he was no longer a Black service member but rather just a Black citizen. Martin said, “I’m a Black man again, you know what I’m saying, versus I’m a Black soldier. Yes, I’m back on the radar. You know what I’m saying? So, I gotta I gotta navigate this a little different than before”.

Three participants made forced decisions due to the nature of the deteriorating conditions of their enlistment. Martin experienced medical injuries and Kelvin’s predominate White leadership saw his performance as substandard and barred him from reenlistment. Last, Mike accepted the fact that he may have received disciplinary for his actions and therefore decided to end his service.

Katie is attending college and working in the Atlanta, Georgia area. She lives in an All Black community like the other participants. She does remain in contact with people that she served with in the military. Katie however avoids socialization with people who are not military affiliated. She said, “You can bump into somebody from the military, and it’s like automatic kinship. So, it’s like hey, I just made this connection that

you don't make with people on an everyday basis". Katie had established a life in the area prior to her injury that was medically unrecoverable. Although she receives Veterans benefits, her economic situation is difficult, and she supplements her lifestyle through part time work.

Last, the participants all demonstrated that they needed to re-invent themselves to find the social-economic fit for the next phase in their personal narratives. Their type and length of service seems to conflict with the US military friendly narrative that businesses and organizations profess. Research by Quillian, et al. (2017), Margo (2004) Schuman, et al. (1985), Terry (1985), and Fendrich (1972) all show the historical patterns of progress in quality of life in employment, and housing for African Americans.

Furthermore, finding employment for African American service members bleeds into the social economic lifestyles of nonmilitary Blacks in the US (Davis & Minnis, 2016; Rose et al. 2017). Katie sums up the conversation with a historical cadence since WWII at least for concerning specifically African American enlisted service members. Katie said,

Well the first thing would be actually finding a job that's one of the things that I think is a misperception too because, these jobs say that they're military friendly, but you fill out the applications you put down you military or la, la, la, la, and then they tell you either you're under qualified, or they don't have, they can't afford to pay you or there's no position available. And it's like, but I thought you were veteran friendly and if I meet the requirements, why not hire me.

## The Overt and Covert Nature of Racism

All eight participants expressed that they have felt some presence of racism throughout their experiences. The way that they expressed racism was in a physical or overt form. Covert forms of racism were not specifically recognized by most of the participants. The issue with covert acts of racism or microaggressions is that people do not readily understand what is going on or that they are engaged in a form of microaggression (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Melinda's experience was framed around her sexual harassment case. She did not identify the power and White privilege and structural racism associated with the case. Racism for her was "as long as you don't put your hands on me or spit on me or anything; we're good. You can do what you want". Forms of microaggressions and other nonphysical forms of racism was not considered by her. She said, "I never really saw color... me sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me". Another example is when Melinda explained:

I think they take it a little too far, as far as saying, we need to take down all the Confederate stuff, all the statues and this, you know, I think those flags like waving in your face like a slap in the face. But you don't have to, you don't have to see those monuments if you're not in those areas. You know? You don't have to pass them all the time or whatever.

Kelvin felt that with racism, "you wouldn't hear racism remarks as much as you would back then because now people are more secretive with it". The formation of normal microaggressions and covert acts of racism were tested through jokes. Mike remarks that his leadership in the military would make slights such as, "like yeah Mike

gonna get the machine gun, because you know all the Black people get the machine guns”.

Campbell, (1996) argues that pathologizing cultural norms is a form of microaggression that Whites engage in when White privilege is a part of the structural racism. Tammy and Martin gaged the covert acts of racism through their experiences dealing with local merchants and their stereotyping and profiling as they visited White owned stores in their bubble. Tammy, Craig, and Melinda shrugged off uncomfortable situation through laughter, calling a situation as “people being ignorant”, or refusing to accept the embedded racism in many of their encounters.

The covert racism comes forward when the participants indicated that they have a mostly White leadership, and supervisory Chain of Command. Katie in one unit saw little opportunity for African American soldier’s promotion where the chain of command was mostly White and a difference when the leadership was mostly African American in another unit. Tammy had very little difficulty in one unit where the culture in the community and unit was predominately minority. In her next job she experienced harassment and what she refers to as “nitpicking”.

### *Life structure*

CRT points out that the American life structure posit that White is naturally over Black (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002). From the participant’s experiences this ideology is true in every re-story. Although they can see that it is not a fair system, they accept the naturalness of the phenomenon. Mike provided an example from his experience when he said:

This is the friend where he started working at a trucking company, at 20, no experience. And he went in as a docking you know just loading the trucks and six months later his mom helped, got him promoted to assistant manager, so you making \$50,000 as a 20-year-old, you feel me.

Melinda's experience demonstrated the power and privilege associated with the White pyramid and covert and overt conditions of institutional racism. From Melinda's point of view, "I was up against a whole lot of white folks, and some, some followers, some black followers. And I was really disappointed [in] those Black folks, they were older than me, and still, you let this woman scare you." Martin was not considered for a cashier's position but instead the managers hired from the outside even though Martin had been with the organization for several months as a cart getter and bagger. Tammy, Craig, and Martin also experienced it while working in a warehouse position. They noticed that after a certain position the leadership in her civilian employment shifted from Black to White.

Kelvin experienced the structure of being not so military friendly after the military service. Kelvin worked in a highly technical job in the military but could not find employment after the service using those skills. He had to take a service job just so he would not remain homeless. Martin felt that blacks get the first level jobs and as an assistant but never the top supervisors or management position. In the life structure for him Martin said "But if you Black, you got to do something. You got to do something out of the ordinary, you got to do something to stand out".

Mike and Katie added that if you are African American and are in positions of influence, there is nothing wrong with leveling the playing field. Mike commented that



even when Blacks are in charge, they fear White power. “You Black bro, and you’re Company Commander. Like you run this. You can change the culture, but I feel like he was really just there to rank up, not gonna step on First Sergeant toes”. Katie’s unit was diverse and with Black leaders as she said, “They wanted to push promotion, like that was the one of their core values like we don’t intend for you to stay like an E anything really, you know. I’m saying we expect you to excel”.

Kelvin provided an observation concerning the distinction between Mike and Katie’s experience and the challenge of Black leadership actions when the presents of White power is a factor. Kelvin said:

I say assimilate because the way society and the way things done at home are obviously gonna not be the way the society that we live in is not natural. I feel like when you, when you’re not dealing with people outside, or those like you; when you’re not dealing with those like you, unnatural things are going to happen, because you live in an unnatural society, making that unnaturalness natural is either gonna give you an issue to where you can’t go for one or the other, where it’s going to have you where you’re torn between the two and you’re just stuck in a balancing act.

The covert and overt presence of institutional racism aligns with CRT where interests and power is tilted by those who are in power. The participants’ experiences demonstrated how they interpret power in social, economic, political, and educational frames. Their lens on work, and everyday life structure was formed by conditions that they understood as normal.

## The Big Challenge to Racism (Challenging Core Values)

The Army Core Values challenge institutional racism and the acts of racism by anyone who lives by an organized system of values. Even if the racism is recognizable through overt or covert means the participants having been held accountable to core values, recognized behavior that is counter to fairness and opportunity. The eight participants provided a range of statements from their experience on how the Army core values can be useful by institutions and leaders to curb institutional racism. The combined narrative that resulted from their responses was a unified voice that supported that institutional racism cannot exist under a system of agreed upon values where leaders support and follow those values.

Melinda began by pointing out, “the White people they, they felt like they had the upper hand, they feel they had the power, and they rub elbows. Unfortunately, us as African Americans, we don't take care of each other.” Mike agreed that communication is an issue for African Americans and that if we can communicate better than “If we all, we live the core values it's like the Declaration of Independence. 50 people came in a room and communicated and created a country and wrote it on paper off of communication”. Tammy suggested that “it's up to the person to want to abide by or live up to the values, live up to the core values”. Because of that Kelvin pointed out that, “organizations and leaders are not as successful in the, the civilian world due to, because if you don't share the same discipline values or core beliefs, you're obviously going to be at odds when it comes to decision making”.

Anthony provided an example of one of the Army values when he stated, “if you have a leader that doesn't respect you, or respect someone else, you will learn not to be

that leader. I wouldn't respect someone who is a leader who is not showing me the respect or showing me the right way”.

Martin said “I think a lot of people they just played a part out in public, you know, but then secretly on the inside, they harbor all these feelings that they know and they're smart enough to know, I can't show this right now.”

Craig said that if that is the case “I don't think you can fulfill the Army Core Values if you are racist like I honestly don't think you'll probably be a leader to people”. He continues his conversation with, “you can't, you can't fulfill every Army Core Value if you are racist, if you have, if you're being discriminatory towards another race, how can, how are you fulfilling the core values”.

Katie summarized the case and said, “I think that, that will pull out the people who are really not worthy of certain positions or, or whatever are not going to be serious workers or employees that will help them to be identified so that the strong people remain the core of the organization. And there'll be more progress.”

The Army core values was valuable to all eight participants and they continue to live by those values or a modified version of those values. Tammy stressed, that people will have to agree to abide by core values if organizations are serious about starting the process of eliminating institutional racism. Having a mission statement and objectives does not provide people with rules that help govern attitudes about racism. Values that hold people accountable to life choices may. The participants in this study experienced a set of core values under the discipline of the military policy and uniformly agree that they can help an organization with institutional racism.

## Summary

The narratives presented by the eight African American enlisted soldiers in this qualitative study presented their individual re-story of how they experienced racism in an organization where racism should be a nonfactor. The participants' encounters with racism in the military provided significant truths about their realities through narrative inquiry and analysis. The CRT conceptional framework maintained the focus on racism and acts of racism sustained institutional racism within their personal narratives. Weaving their narratives into a cohesive re-story using the Labovian model allowed a single voice to emerge through four themes.

Prior to the military, the enlisted soldiers' understanding of institutional racism was limited to the discussions within their individual bubble. Discussions about racism in their homes and communities were clouded by the institutional racism that defined their existence as normal. School and work conditions absorbed the conditions of their existence and locked their experiences and perceptions into the social, political, educational, and economic life within their bubble.

Volunteering in the military produced game-changing perspectives of reality for the participants. In-service game changers like battle buddies and understanding the color of equity through diversity within the organizational structure offered a new cadence to normal interaction between races. Army Core Values disrupted the normal cadence of institutional racism by holding everyone under the policies of the U.S. Army accountable for their actions. Individual selective acts of racism were visible and easily identifiable by anyone to callout and consequences under U.S. ARMY policy. The

participants offered evidence of how White Pyramids and social political domination in the Army works around, hides, and protects overt and covert acts of institutional racism.

Nevertheless, post military re-stories of the participants show how the participants viewed themselves outside of the military bubble. Their attempts to re-fit into the non-military life forced them to social-economic conditions and realities outside of the military bubble. All eight participants used the Post 9/11 or Vocational Rehabilitation Military Educational benefits while attempting to restructure their realities with families and the daily stressors stimulated from living in a mostly African American bubble. Their social economic choices forced them to embrace the White pyramid very early in their post military life and they began to redesign their lives to mirror their nonmilitary friends and family.

The re-stories offer organizations and their leaders' ideas on how institutional racism can help move people from a bubble of inclusion or keep them trapped to remain in a condition of marginalization existence and thought. The participants all agree that core values such as the U.S. Army Core Values can be a tool to create merit-based employees who are held to high standards of inclusion. Core values can become a game changer in an organization and leaders can significantly provide the diversity and inclusion that is so popularly manifested in companies' policies. Whilst racism may not be eliminated, incorporation of core values may mitigate occurrences of racial motivation acts.

## Chapter VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

As stated, before the purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to provide a deeper understanding of racism from the voice of the enlisted soldier using their lived experiences as data. Their re-story allowed the enlisted soldiers to provide meaning to racism and acts of racism so that leaders in organizations can help create policies and practices to deal with racism in their organizations. The U.S. Army with its ideology of teamwork and mission-focused leadership was an ideal organization to study.

Included in this chapter is a summary of the findings. The themes that emerged from the experiences of the enlisted Soldier connected with the literature presented earlier in Chapter II. In addition, Critical Race Theory was the theoretical framework used in the study and offers some implications for leaders in organizations in the 21st Century. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and final thoughts from the researcher.

The research questions listed below were used in the discovery of information and might be considered useful starting points for future research:

RQ 1. How did eight recently separated African American U.S. Army service members perceive race before military service?

RQ 2. How did eight recently separated U.S. Army service members perceive race while on active duty?

RQ 3. How did eight recently separated U.S. Army service members perceive race after military service?

RQ4. How did the U.S. Army's Core Values shape your understanding of racism after military service?

The researcher used narrative coding and the Labovian modal of the eight participants' re-stories which produced five themes. Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework for the research helped to co-weave the combined voices of the participants' narratives. A purposeful sample using recently separated enlisted soldiers living in the south, attending college, and using the Post 9/11 GI Bill provided controls for future studies.

Each participant volunteered to complete three 90-minute interviews that produced saturated rich qualitative data. Analysis of the interview data produced the themes of (1) The premilitary racial bubble, (2) In-service game-changers of racism, (3) Post military polarization, (4) The overt and covert nature of racism, (5) Challenging core values. The themes provided a unique voice of color that added to the knowledge of racism of marginalized voices that through social, political, economic, and educational constructs in the African American culture are often ignored.

### *Summary of Findings*

The methods used in the study were vital in providing data that was rich with information that led to the development of the five themes. The eight participants' combined themes created one single story that added to and fill gaps in the discussion and limited research on racism from this understudied group. The themes connected to the literature on racism through the voices of the eight African American enlisted recently

separated U.S. Army service members who voluntarily participated in this study.

Anderson (2016); Alexander (2010); Terry (1985); Woodson (1933) showed that there have been very little changes in the diaspora of African American communities in America.

Their experiences also represented their perceptions about their realities on racism before, during, and after military service. The factors that shaped those realities manifested from the social, political, economic, and educational climate that they experienced. Their narratives when combined, have similarities that form the nexus on how they identified racism as seen through their lens.

#### *The Pre-Military Racial Bubble*

The bubble represents the social structure, attitudes, and policing climate within the neighborhoods and the polarizing conditions of political, economic redlining, and marginalization. Class structures in the African American culture have also separated the African American culture. These class structures in the African American communities began to surface during the 1960's Civil Rights Movement and played out in the experiences of the 21st-century African American citizens' lived experiences.

The conditions are what Mallach (2018) and Dillon (2007) described as the generational creation of marginalization within the African American communities. Anderson (2016) and Mallach (2018) offers that the bubble(s) stem from a historical lens and is the residual outcomes from the separation of African Americans class structure produced during the Civil Rights. Wong et al. (2014) adds that second-class citizenship, the assumption of criminality, pathologizing cultural norms, and environmental



invalidation are infestations in many of the bubbles where African Americans live out their realities.

The participants all had similar stories of a single-family structure where the female was the head of the house, and other female family members formed the family core. Some of the participants K-12 experiences were different when they compared it to a predominately White K-12 school. The participants had economic challenges resulting from frequently moving, welfare, and evictions that were a regular cadence in their pre-military lives. The stressors of everyday living through crime-ridden neighborhoods were other factors in their experience.

Each participant, with the exception of one, experienced the absence of a protector. These factors created the social constructs that the participants identified as the "bubble" or the "area." Racism was not an issue because of the normalcy of the adopted conditions of families, friends, and neighbors who all live within the same bubble. Most of the participants did not see or experience a physical form of racism, and therefore their everyday existence of navigating through their issues was a nonexperience with racism. Alexander (2010) and Anderson (2016) both noted that the protector is absent in many African American communities where crime is the highest and supports Mallach (2018) and Margo (2004) reports on the disposition of the single parent home led by the single female.

The seeming normalcy of the impact that homelessness and eviction created is remarkable. Many of the participants had to frequently adjust to the thought of moving and changes in their K-12 education. Crime, irregularities in policing, and economic disenfranchisement infested the bubbles that create the school to prison pipeline

conditions. Many of the scholars who have provided literature on the African American schools and communities provided studies that suggest the accuracy in these conditions are real and detrimental to the Black community (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 2016; Desmond, 2017; Leovy, 2015; Solomon & Rankin, 2019).

The participants' identities and values were shaped by their views of progressiveness but barricaded by the boundaries of the bubble. Going to college or the military was a way of escaping the bubble. The U.S. Army was not their first choice. It was an emerging idea coming from others outside of their family structure except for Kelvin and Anthony, whose fathers were veterans.

The bubble is a reality for many African Americans. The study did not intentionally look for economic factors when considering participants. The fact that the eight participants all fall into the same economic, social, educational, and political diaspora is coincidental. It does provide validity to the historical re-occurring cultural theme embedded in the African American culture and signifies the idea of how social-economic practices corral African Americans.

### *In-service Game Changers*

Elements of the in-service game changers that re-programmed the participants provided valuable insight into how the participants viewed themselves and constructed their realities through their experiences. The military ideology on sameness placed each service member on the same level, and all rules applied equally. They gained a sense of ethics when facing challenges as a team or when accompanied by a battle buddy. NCOs runs the day-to-day operations where in most instances, a balanced and diverse work environment play host to many military teams. The formal and informal leader

influenced the permanent party politics who represented the culture of the individual units. The participants experience how the color of equality can shift from unit to unit through military social-political domination, and that became factors in their military career.

Basic and Advanced Individual Training act as game-changers and places the same standards on individuals and allows the individual to conform to standards of conduct and values. Basic and Advanced Individual Training emerges as a rite of passage that changes the individualism of Americans and embeds the sense of teamwork and mission focus. One of the significant components of this workforce ideology is that every soldier is subject to the primary core values that reward their merit and dedication. Soldiers whose actions operate outside of these values results in lackluster consequences, substandard accomplishments, and outcomes.

Basic Training and Advance Individual Training allows enlisted soldiers to experience the sameness and is subject to the strict policies, practices, and procedures that are a historical, cultural custom and a rite of passage for enlisted service members. Racism becomes a measurable variable against the Army Core Values. Actions that are contrary to those values by individuals are an acceptable practice. Practices that harbor racism by groups are subject to interpretation by witnesses and fall within the tenets of Critical Race Theory.

Each participant went through Basic and Advanced Individual Training and was introduced to a team that included a battle buddy to help them navigate through challenging mental and physical obstacles. The battle buddy was a person assigned to the participant regardless to race or ethnicity, a tradition that has been in the Army for

decades. Each participant identified that their battle buddy was White or another race except for Tammy and Katie. Nevertheless, the bonds that resulted from being bound to each other day and night were a game changer that challenged their perceptions of other races.

Other game changers were the physical presence of a diverse, unified chain of command that held everyone equally accountable to common standards. The participants found that their diverse cadre was a significant factor when it came to them being able to progress on their merit, work ethic, and as a team. As the participants moved from Basic to Advanced Individual Training, the same standards held except when some participants were in a unit that was not diverse and mostly White.

The opportunities that came with following core values proved to be challenging and, in some instances, contradictory for most of the participants. Permanent party politics changed the Army Core Values when any of the participants served in units that lacked diversity. The lack of diversity became a game-changer as predominately White supervisors, and chains of commands used the Army system of discipline, reward and punishment, and leadership for their personal interest. Each participant viewed that their issues were not viewed the same as their White counterparts, which punctuated their decisions to separate from the military.

Military social-political domination was most prevalent when their NCO support channel was all White, and their formal Chain of Command followed the U.S. Army's' historical White pyramid structure. This structure is the same structure that is prevalent in the American culture and supports the CRT assumption by Delgado and Stefancic (2002) that White over Black serves a purpose. Observations of most military walls

where pictures of their Chains of Commands are present support this assumption. A key characteristic is that in many Chains of Commands an African American Command Sergeant Major (CSM) occupies a key leadership role that connects the enlisted Soldier to the Military Officer. Each participant who described significant issues pointed out that when the CSM, First Sergeant, or Senior NCO was African American, resolving issues were acceptable. Bell (1980), Loggins (2016), Downing (2012) and Mencke (2010) agree with the idea that the color of equity harbors in conditions where diversity is balanced and the minorities in positions of power have access over Whites to fair legal discourse.

#### *Post Military Polarization*

The participants separated from the military due to medical, personal, or dissatisfaction with their Chain of Command. Their trajectory for their post-military life was contingent on social-economic forced decisions immediately leaving the military. All but two of the participants moved to Atlanta, Georgia immediately after their separation. All eight participants lived with a relative or joined a spouse who previously established residency in a predominately Black community.

All of the participants polarized themselves within post military communities that were similar to their pre-military community. Melinda is the only participant attending college who does not work. All participants indicated that they keep to themselves and do not socialize too often due to work and school. Tammy reconnected with friends from her pre-military experience but limits her connection with current events. Tammy said that she rarely keeps up with the news about politics and other national and local issues.

Kelvin, for example, explained that he has very little social life and limits his friends.

Katie also mentioned that she only associates with other veterans.

The participants remain close to the military lifestyle and avoid blending in with their college peers. Social life for them was secondary to obtaining a degree so that they can move past their current bubble. Conditions of equality are starkly different outside of the enlisted military bubble. The participants find themselves re-emerged in the same bubble that they escaped from before they joined the military. The difference after the military is that they are now responsible adults.

A host of scholars and subject-matter researchers such as Quillian, et al. (2017), Margo (2004), Schuman et al. (1985), Terry (1985), and Fendrich (1972) lend their research to point out that post-military quality of life for African Americans is disturbing due to stereotyping and discrimination. For example, programs to aid in post-military employment do not offer livable wages. In addition, slogans that suggest an organization claiming to be "military friendly" do little to help any soldier with a job post-military and are misleading. Many African Americans receive offers that place them in lower-paid service-sector jobs disproportionately to White separating soldiers with equivalent skill sets.

### *The Overt and Covert Nature of Racism*

The participants believed that racism was an easily identifiable overt act. Melinda attributed racism as spitting on a person or taking of possessions. The removal of the confederate flag in South Carolina was a form of correcting the overt act of racism. To her, the Confederate Flag was "like a slap in the face." The Confederate monuments were not a big deal because "people rarely passed by them." The other participants stated

that they had not seen racism because it did not happen to them. Kelvin explained that racism was "not in your face."

The participants did not discuss the condition of their bubble other than to explain the crime and inadequate education. Even after the military, Tammy hesitated to define racism when it is happening to her. Marvin fears that he may turn back to his pre-military bubble because he is no longer a "Black Soldier, he is a Black man". Kelvin believes that because he is acquainted with his managers, his lifelong stance to ignore and not address racism, that this is his best armament.

### *Challenging Core Values*

The Army core values had a substantial impact on the participants except for Tammy. Tammy believes that she had strong values before the military. She feels that if leaders accepted core values, they are only as practical as people's willingness to abide by them. Other participants believe that early intervention of core values can have an impact on people's behavior towards others. The participants did not feel that it would eradicate racism but would be a step in the right direction.

The Army Core Values did make the difference in the way the participants understand racism and the challenges that they face post-military. Each participant understood his or her bubble better post military. The participants demonstrated agreement that the military values and the conditions of Basic Training allowed them to transform and be more accepting of other races. Marvin stated that because of the military and his Basic Training experience that he could no longer think the way that he did. Craig mentioned that although this was his first time in life interacting with White people and others, he knows that he can get along with anyone.

## Implications for Leaders

Social, economic, political, and educational factors have been successful in keeping African Americans in a state of mind that they are subordinate to a White power structure. Laws, policies, and everyday practices of White historical inheritance through White privilege support this structure. Hiring people of color to fill the human resource plan continues to be one form of standard practice used by many organizations, where the organization has little interest in diversity (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Solórzano, et al., 2000).

Institutional and structural racism against African Americans in organizations has been embedded, socially constructed force in the US culture for centuries. White organizational structures intentionally or unintentionally used policy and practices that kept African Americans in lessor leadership positions and marginal positions that served their interest while maintaining an ideology that White over Black serves a purpose (Delgado and Stefancic, 2002). Competition is a tool that White administrators use to conceal the nepotism and favoritism that support institutional racism embedded in most public and private organizations. As long as White leadership is in control over the organization or Whites have a controlling influence over Black leaders, then the balance of power is as it should.

The U.S. Army has shown, however, that when provided with an opportunity, Blacks are equally capable of outstanding achievements in all segments of American prosperity. The U.S. Army has been a leader since WWII in the slow progression to allow workers the opportunity to be prosperous based on merit, team building, and adherence to discipline outlined in their system of policies, regulations, and Uniform Code of Military Justice (UMCJ). When African Americans volunteer to serve in the



military, the idea of second-class citizen crumbles as diverse leaders apply an organizational policy that promotes fairness regardless of race. White-dominated social structures disappear and in its place are actors, of all races, who focus on goals and objectives and hold workers accountable under the fairest of conditions.

Along with equality policies, regulations, and UMCJ the U.S. Army has put into place a set of Army Core Values. The values guide all soldiers, both enlisted and officer, in the execution of their daily commitment and sworn oaths. These values challenge discrimination and acts of racism by any individual or group within the U.S. Army. All enlisted service members who volunteer to serve in the U.S. Army learn these values during Basic Training.

Acts of racism flourishes when White supervisors and leaders in the U.S. Army form a power structure that mirrors the non-military work structures. Participants demonstrated that their post-military workforce structures were predominately White in key leadership positions and that their worst experiences in the U.S. Army was when they had a predominantly White NCO support team and formal Chain of Command.

Fairness in promoting workers and appointing people in positions without regard to race starts the process of creating a diverse organization. Leaders should start by being accepting of African American culture or Blackness. Whites who engage in Black communities and the daily lives of African Americans that are in the same workspace begins the process of addressing the microaggressions that plague much misinformation about the Black communities that Kang (2005) and Wong et al. (2014) outlined. Leaders could eradicate the thinking that exists in marginalized bubbles by opening the doors of opportunity in the community through their sponsorship and personal activism.

Diverse workforces like the servicemembers had during basic training created the conditions of collaboration through team efforts and expanded the tolerances for other races. Leaders in organizations who are interested in a global workforce that can thrive in the future should consider how the leaders in the U.S. Army uses diversity and teams to get its workforce to produce at a high level. Albeit that the military still has some work to do within their Officer Corps, the NCO Support Channels, however, have the propensity to be a tool of research and discovery (Moskos & Butler, 1996).

Removing racism from individual thought and action does not happen if the individual is unwilling to change and conditions support individual supremacy. Placing soldiers on teams and partnerships within the teams offers a chance for people to overcome their differences (DiAngelo, 2018). Teams and individuals form bonds through collaboration, and work contribution, over extended periods.

The U.S. Army uses this process to promote competition and to motivate their workforces to obtain goals. Achievement becomes a sense of team pride and many times replaces non-disciplinary motivation. The teams all gel as one, and team pride becomes more important than racism. Leaders outside of the military who use this approach can create the type of workforce that focuses better on their mission than inter-rival socially and political ambitions of interest such as racism in a capitalist society.

### Limitations

One of the apparent limitations in this study were the purposeful sample of eight African American enlisted soldiers who recently separated from service and that the participants knew that the study was going to be about racism that they experienced in the military. The studies maintained the focus on their personal experiences about racism. It

may, however, provide leaders with a contribution that adds to the understanding of racism from the perspectives of marginalized groups.

Forms of racism and microaggressions have a historical and transformational legacy in American culture. It has penetrated, incubated, and released acts and actions that supported subhuman acts, and actions. The delivery methods for these subhuman acts and action traveled through the social, economic, political, and educational instruments about African Americans that managed to maintain the subhuman treatment and acts that continue to create marginalization.

Using this sample and sample size assumed that the participants from this major city who attend a state college represent the experiences of all African Americans and are therefore valid under these standards. The qualitative results do, however, present rich information about the individual lived experiences about racism. Also, given the fact that there are no indications that any participants knew one another before, during, or after they separated from the military demonstrates the validity, authenticity, and coherence when their combined narratives produce similar themes. These themes provided the essence needed to shape their experiences into meaning.

Participation in the study was voluntary and the focus of the study was racism. There was an opportunity for biases from the participants that could be detrimental to the purpose of the study. However, controlling the open-ended narratives through semi-structured questions to guide the conversation to addressed this issue and eliminated conversations that were counter to the purpose of the study. There was, however, great leniency to allow the participants to re-story their experiences from their perspectives.

When presenting the results, the researcher presented thick, rich vignettes from the participants' narratives so that their stories represented their voice.

### Recommendations for Further Research

This study offers several opportunities for future research through qualitative and longitudinal studies. Qualitative studies that exist from the perspective of the enlisted Soldier about race issues in the Army are scarce. Longitudinal studies that focus on racism are equally scarce. That void in studies on racism presents opportunities in scholarship to broaden the research on enlisted servicemembers and fill existing gaps. Additional studies with a direct focus on enlisted servicemembers would begin to fill the current void in the literature for this marginalized voice on racism.

Quantitative studies can broaden the study by providing insight on the elements that may trigger cause and effect of microaggressions and systemic racism that is embedded in military politics, policies, and practices. Future studies using quantitative methods to studies how core values directly or indirectly impact the outcome of racist attitudes or racism in teams in a merit-based organization would add understanding to the research.

For example, a qualitative study on how does the removal of the Confederate flag or the renaming of military installations impact core values, moral, and unit readiness in the armed service among minorities who have experienced racism while in the service can provide leaders with information on how to deal with unit cohesion and training. Leaders can use this type of military study in their organizations to address how emotional public events affect their workforce. They then have the opportunity to

develop training using empirical research and best practices to help reduce anxiety and stress that could arise from racial bias and polarization.

Qualitative studies on other minority-enlisted soldiers on racism would add to the body of knowledge. Likewise, a study on the perceptions of White recently separated enlisted services would provide a contrasting view on understanding racism. Not having the discussions only adds to the current discourse about racism in the US and the U.S. Army.

Future studies can use various types of longitudinal studies such as cohorts and panels to capture the military members' experiences with racism across any of the tenets and theoretical frameworks. Longitudinal studies offer the type of emersion and targeted research that can focus on specific tenets of interest. Longitudinal studies are costly dependent on the duration and the complexity. The outcomes however would benefit and add to the research on racism.

Longitudinal studies using cohorts of participants who entered the military at the same point of entry would allow the research to follow the daily experiences of the participants over time. This type of study might carry over to other minority groups and utilize different perspectives such as college and those who move from high school to the work force. The results would reveal how other minority groups experience racism from their particular perspectives.

Longitudinal studies using panels is another way to capture how African Americans experience racism through different tenets. For example, the recent racism that is associated with policing is a specific and current tenet that a longitudinal study can explore in a direct way. A panel using different generations of service members can

provide a meaningful look at how racism is experienced from a historical view. Another way to use longitudinal studies is through panels of service members from different branches of service where the research can explore the similarities and differences in how the military armed forces deal with racism at multiple levels from the enlisted servicemember's perspective.

Latino/Hispanic, Asian American, and Pacific Islander enlisted soldiers as a shortlist of other minority groups all have their experiences with racism. Just as there are limited studies on African American enlisted soldiers on racism, other minority studies that focus on the enlisted soldier's experiences about racism are sparse. Studies on these marginalized groups could expose the true impact of racism. Additionally, it may point out how minority groups tend to polarize themselves within communities to protect their interests and preserve their cultures.

A study of White recently separated service members is another way to understand racism. Enlisted studies in this area can also fill gaps and add to the limited knowledge of the understanding of racism. This type of study opens the doors of discussion and discovery and could help engage in taking the discomfort and challenges from conversations about race and racism.

### Conclusion

Using an open-ended narrative inquiry, with semi-structured questions, eight recently separated enlisted soldiers offered their experiences on how they experienced racism before, during, and after the military. All participants offered their re-stories through their voice, and their narratives produced five combined themes that they have in

common as part of their lived reality about racism before, during, and after serving in the U.S. Army.

They all experienced living what they describe as a bubble or confined area. They all discussed how the military proved to have game-changing events that help shape their perceptions about people and diversity. Once the participants separated from the U.S. Army, they all entered into a polarized state that resembled their pre-military experiences. Through these experiences, the participants demonstrated what they understood about overt and covert racism. Last, they all expressed how the Army Core Values can be a factor in non-military organizations in helping to teach people how to provide an opportunity for all.

Critical Race Theory provided the framework for this understudied research area in which recently separated enlisted soldiers' experiences about racism before, during, and after military service was the focus of the inquiry. Their counter-narratives, through their re-stories, re-affirmed that racism continues to be a consistent pattern in the U.S. social, political, economic, and educational construct. The historical patterns of racism continue to be a persistent agent that defines leadership and the validation of White privilege ideologies.

Racism does infiltrate the walls of the U.S. Army's practices and policies. The U.S. Army's strategies to level the playing field for opportunities, however, gives hope to marginalize groups and provides game-changers that provided enlisted soldiers with the foundations to understand how to overcome racist ideologies. The narratives from the research participants gave the voice to the enlisted soldiers and a link to the African American communities that research often leaves out of the diaspora in the conversation

about racism. The narratives added a voice to research through conversation that adds the aesthetics to the human story and the way that the participants experience their realities.

Critical Race Theory holds up to arguments about African American realities that support the tenets of counter-narratives to institutional and structural racism. The research also considered interest divergence and microaggression as ways to explain the narratives provided by the eight participants. This approach helps to explain the normalcy that has moved acts of racism to covert expressions in the US culture. The holistic experiences of the participants come forward with the support of frameworks that places racism forward in the conversation.



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APPENDIX A:

**Participant Interview Questions**

## Research Question Matrix

Research Question	Data Source	Interview Guiding Questions
<p>RQ 1.</p> <p>How did eight African recently American separated U.S. Army service members perceive race prior to military service?</p> <p>RQ 2.</p> <p>What factors may have influenced the recently separated U.S. Army service member's perception of race while on active duty?</p>	<p>Interview one: Focused</p> <p>Seidman's Interview Series</p>	<p>RQ 1.</p> <p>Tell me about your yourself.</p> <p>Tell me about upbringing, family, and influences?</p> <p>What was it like growing up/living in your city/town?</p> <p>What were some of the most memorable experiences prior to the military?</p> <p>What was your experience with other ethnic groups and races?</p> <p>What experience(s) led to your decision to enlist in the military</p> <p>RQ 2.</p> <p>Describe your Basic and AIT experience.</p> <p>Where was your first duty assignment?</p> <p>How did your Squad, Platoon, Company function?</p> <p>What did soldiers do after work</p> <p>Tell me about your Chain of Command and NCO support channel?</p> <p>What is your perception of military leader's actions in dealing with diversity and race?</p>



		What were some examples for people violating the Army Core Values?
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Research Question	Data Source	Interview Guiding Questions
<p>RQ 1.</p> <p>How did African American recently separated U.S. Army service members perceive race prior to military service?</p>	<p>Interview two: The Details of the Experience</p> <p>Seidman's Interview Series:</p>	<p>RQ 1.</p> <p>What were your experiences with discussions about race and racism in your home, community, school, and work?</p> <p>How do your close associates (family and friends) feel about acts of racism?</p> <p>RQ 2.</p> <p>Reconstruct a day in the life of your role in the Army.</p> <p>Describe your team/squad.</p> <p>Describe your units and the leaders.</p> <p>Describe any questionable or obvious acts of racism that you have witnessed while in the military.</p>
<p>RQ 2.</p> <p>What factors may have influenced the recently separated U.S. Army service member's perception of race while on active duty?</p>		

<p>RQ 3. How did the recently separated U.S. Army service members make sense of acts of racism after serving in the military?</p> <p>RQ 4. How did the U.S. Army's core values shape your understanding of Racism After military service?</p>		<p>How did you discuss racism within your team or close friends?</p> <p>RQ 3. What are some of the challenges you face after leaving the military? Describe your close associates after the service. What are the conversations between you and your family, friends, and associates surrounding racism?</p> <p>RQ 4. Describe how your current employer, college, family or friends can benefit from the Army Core Values How did people get away with violating the Army Core Values?</p>
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Research Question Reflections	Data Source	Interview Guiding Questions
Open-ended reflections	<p>Interview three: Reflection on the Meaning</p> <p>Seidman's Interview Series</p>	<p>How do you make sense of acts of racism?</p> <p>How does the Army Core Value influence your response and actions towards acts of racism after having experienced the military?</p>

APPENDIX B:

Participant Interview Timeline

*Participants Interview Timeline*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Interview One</b>	<b>Interview Two</b>	<b>Interview Three</b>
Melinda	January 28, 2020	January 30, 2020	February 4, 2020 <sup>7</sup>
Mike	January 27, 2020	January 28, 2020	January 30, 2020
Tammy	February 10, 2020	February 19, 2020	March 2, 2020
Kelvin	February 3, 2020 <sup>134</sup>	February 4, 2020	March 3, 2020
Anthony	February 10, 2020	February 12, 2020	February 24, 2020
Martin	February 11, 2020	February 19, 2020	March 2, 2020
Craig	February 18, 2020 <sup>43</sup>	February 25, 2020	March 5, 2020
Katie	February 24, 2020	March 3, 2020	March 5, 2020

APPENDIX C:  
Six Part Labovian Model

## Six-Part Labovian Model-(Mike)

<p>What were the discussions about racism that you had with family and friends after being in the military? (A)</p> <p>Mike: When you in Oklahoma (O)</p> <p>you're in a bubble (CA) you know I mean?</p> <p>And they very good at keeping you in a bubble (E)</p> <p>But once you get out of that bubble (CA)</p> <p>and you can see from the outside looking in, it's a different perspective, (E) you know. And that's a hard pill to swallow (R) you know what I mean?</p> <p>Because the way I view the world versus the way my family views (CA) the world is completely differently (E) now. And that's because I was able to get out of the black hole.</p> <p>I think the bubble, is, is relevant everywhere. I've seen the bubble in different places I lived. But yeah, after getting out of the bubble and just being able to experience more (R) you understand it is everywhere, but you also understand that there are a lot of opportunities (C).</p>	<p>1. Abstract The story is about reflection on discussions about racism with family after military service</p> <p>2. Orientation When? Living in Oklahoma</p> <p>3. Complicating Action What Happened? You are in a bubble</p> <p>4. Evaluation So what? They are very good at keeping you in the bubble</p> <p>3. Complicating Action What Happen? You get out</p> <p>4. Evaluation So what? Different perspective</p> <p>3. Complicating Action What Happen? My family views the world</p> <p>4. Evaluation So what? I view it differently</p> <p>5. Result What finally happen? That's a hard pill to swallow/Out of the bubble you experience more</p> <p>6. Coda: Sign-off. You understand there are a lot of opportunities</p>
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APPENDIX D:

Participants' Pseudonyms and Demographics

*Participants Pseudonym & Demographics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Personal Background Descriptors</b>
Melinda	Single parent home, military paygrade E-7, first-generation college student, Single parent
Mike	Single parent home, first generation college student, highest military paygrade E-5
Tammy	Single parent home, single parent, first generation college student, highest military paygrade E-4
Kelvin	Two parent home, first generation college student, highest military pay grade E-4
Anthony	Single parent home, first generation college student, highest military pay grade E-4
Martin	Back and forth between parents, left home at 16, highest military pay grade E-4
Craig	Single parent home, first generation college student, highest military pay grade E-4
Katie	Entered the service after age 25, grew up in the north, highest military pay grade E-6

APPENDEX E:

Participants Perceptions on Racism



*Participants perceptions on Racism*

Pseudonym	Before Military	During Military	After Military	Army Core Values ACV)
Melinda	Racism not a big issue. Did not experience racism	Racism was embedded in a personal situation	Lives in a Black community racism not an issue. Racism is a physical thing	The ACV can have an impact to address racism
Mike	Racism was a problem in school and the community. Was homeless. Lived in shelters.	Saw racism early on in the military. Often challenged authority when they did not follow policy	Lives in Black community had issues with Law Enforcement	ACV guides him as an entrepreneur. The ACV are the basis for his business ethics
Tammy	Did not experience racism. Grew up in single family home on Section 8. Food insecurities experienced evictions & homelessness	Racism was a form of nitpicking. Female in an infantry unit was the accuse from the nitpicking	Lives in a Predominantly White neighborhood. Friends are all Black. Avoids acts of racism that she experiences	People must be willing to accept the ACV. She has mixed feelings that they matter
Kelvin	Two parent military home. He thought that racism was something that was understood, and his family did not really talk about racism	Racism was all around. You had to assimilate, or face being put in the out group. Often time he was the only African American in the motor pool	Faced homelessness and difficulty finding a job. Sticks to himself is a loner School is his focus but works because it's just him	ACV can make a big difference in how leaders lead their workforce. They should be a part of the K-12 education
Anthony	Witness the differences living in the ghetto and suburbs. Experienced racism in schools with teachers' micro aggressive attitudes	Basic Training was great but when he got to permanent party, he face continuous issues with acts of racism in both duty stations	His wife talks about racism all of the time. They both are in college and work while living in a Black community	Leaders can benefit from the ACV in nonmilitary organizations and should strive to lead by example

Martin	Lived in a single parent home. Troubled youth who experience that each time that he got in trouble it was White people involved. Experienced homelessness	Things changed about his tolerance for White people during Basic training. Witness lots of diversity and racism was not an issue. Discovered that he needed to change	Experienced the difference of racism acts outside of the military. He was no longer a black Soldier... he was now a Black man	He feels that if leaders and organizations in outside of the military can use the ACV that it would be a big game changer.
Craig	Did not encounter any other races while growing up in a single parent home. Racism was not experienced	First time that he worked with or had friends or acquaintances who were White people. All of his units were diverse no issues with racism	He sees how all of the workers in the warehouse are African American and the supervisors are White. Does not think that racism affects him and his generation March 5, 2020	Believes that there is value in the ACV and that racism is fading and the AVC in organizations can help eliminate racism
Katie	Racism was discussed in the home. Family share their sense of pride and who they are. School and local community was diverse where everyone got along with one another	Experienced how units reacted differently with the same policy when the leadership was predominately Black or White. leadership	Only interacts with Veterans of all races. Had difficulty finding a job when she left the military. Even though she is highly qualified she only gets work that is low-level service jobs	ACV are extremely valuable to leaders outside of the military. It can make the difference in well ran or poorly motivated organizations

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## APPENDIX F:

### Permission to Conduct Study

Permission to Conduct Study

From: lmsingletary@valdosta.edu

To: Atlanta Metropolitan State College IRB Administrator

Date:

Subject: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Leander M. Singletary, and I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Education, Leadership program at Valdosta State University. I am in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation. I hope to add to the body of knowledge in understanding recently separated soldier's experiences on racism before, during, and after military service. The title of the research is: A Narrative Inquiry of Recently Separated African American Army Enlisted Soldier's Experiences on Racism.

The project involves interviewing veteran students who attend your college and are using Post 9/11 G.I. Bill or Vocational Rehabilitation veterans' educational benefits. The research will be narratives of the participants' life before the military to the present. The interviews will not include information that may identify any of the participants. An IRB application will be submitted to Valdosta State University as required by my committee chair.

To complete my research, I will need to conduct three interviews from a purposeful selected sample of participants who meet the requirements as recently separated veterans. The study is strictly volunteer, and the participants can opt out of the study at any time. I will need permission to contact veteran students through the campus Veterans Resource Center (VRC) using email and posting a sign-up roster in the VRC.

If my request is approved, I will meet with students in the VRC to conduct the three interviews for each participant and each interview will last no more than 90 minutes. The scheduling of the interviews will be random as to accommodate the student's schedule. My goal is to begin the interviews right away so that I can complete the interviews within the next eight weeks.

I believe my research will fill the gaps in understanding institutional racism and strengthen the understanding necessary to address issues of inclusion and equality for organizations and leaders. If you agree, kindly respond to this email request and provide written signed approval on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your institution.

I thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,  
Leander M. Singletary lmsingletary@valdosta.edu

APPENDIX G:

Participant Consent Statement

## Participant Consent Statement

You are invited to participate in a research project titled “A Narrative Inquiry of Recently Separated African American Army Enlisted Soldier’s Experiences on Racism Before, During, and After Military Service” to understand how racism is experienced from an understudied population. Your contributions may assist organizational leaders develop diversity training for the 21-century organization. Leander M. Singletary, a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology at Valdosta State University, is conducting the research project. You were a recently separated veteran of the U.S. Army in a merit-based organization and part of a team, which were the bases for your selection. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

**Purpose** The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to provide a deeper understanding of racism from the voice of the enlisted soldier. Specifically, I want to ask you to re-story your life and explore your experiences with a direct focus on racism. I would also like to try to determine how the Army core values shaped your perceptions and experiences on acts of racism. The purpose is not to demonstrate nor support the assumption that racism is prevalent in the U.S. Army.

**Procedures** If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to set up a mutually agreeable time for three 90-minute interviews. In the interview, you will freely tell your life story with limited guiding questions that will maintain the focus on your re-story and racism. You will be asked questions to discuss different aspects of your life story that includes your life before, during and after the military. The interviewer will record your answers with a recording device, to create transcripts that will provide data for analysis. Your identity will not be revealed, and your information will be protected. You will have opportunity to review your transcripts and to quit the interview at any time.

**Possible Risks or Discomfort** You may feel uncomfortable talking about personal aspects of your life and/or difficult experiences. You will not be coerced or forced to explore any situation that is discomforting. No names will appear on the interviewer's notes, and because the interviewer will respect your privacy and the confidentiality of your interview responses, there is little risk in your participation.

**Potential Benefits** The study may provide gaps in research through a qualitative lens and give a voice seldom reflected surrounding the issues of racism from African American enlisted soldiers. Understanding racism from your perspectives may help leaders at all levels in the military, universities, and corporate organizations develop policy and training that can help close the gap in institutional racism.

**Costs and Compensation** There are no monetary costs to you for your time. There is no compensation for your participation in this research project. Your participation is 100% voluntary

Assurance of Confidentiality Valdosta State University and I will maintain the confidentiality of your information according to federal, state, and institutional laws and policies. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee may be given access to your confidential information, as they are the governing and controlling body of the research at the research site. Your identity will not be disclosed if I publish any report or article other than the dissertation of this study. All research records will be kept in a secured locked file.

Voluntary Participation This study is strictly volunteer, and you may end your participate in this research at any time. Your decision will not affect your current or future relations with your institution or veteran status and veteran benefits. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting these relationships.

Information Contacts This study follows the guidelines set by Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

## APPENDIX H

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



## Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



**ATLANTA METROPOLITAN STATE COLLEGE**

1630 Metropolitan Parkway, SW  
Atlanta, Georgia 30310

Office of the Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness

12/05/2019

Leander M. Singletary  
1630 Metropolitan State College  
Atlanta, GA 30310

IRB Approval Date: 12/05/2019

Dear Mr. Singletary:

The Atlanta Metropolitan State College Institutional Review Board ("IRB" or "Board") has reviewed and approved your IRB application for the research/study titled, ***"A Narrative Inquiry of Recently Separated African American Army Enlisted Soldier's Experiences on Racism Before, During, and After Military Service."*** Your research request complies with policies established by the College for the protection of human subjects in research/studies. Unless renewed, this approval is effective until December 31, 2020. This approval is contingent upon the following:

1. The investigation must follow all steps outlined in the approved IRB application.
2. Any change in the procedure as described must be approved by the IRB prior to altering the research.
3. Atlanta Metropolitan State College, nor individuals interviewed, are referenced or identified in any publications of or related work to this research.
4. Collected data are secured and disposed of as indicated and agreed upon in the IRB application.
4. The type, category, scheduling, and conditions of the research are approved based on the approved "Premises, Recruitment and Name (PRN) Use Permission Form and related documents submitted with the IRB application.
5. This study/research is not associated with a solicitation or a process that is intended to or will lead to an "ask" for the adoption of new product(s) and/or service(s) for students and/or faculty. All adoptions of teaching materials and related classroom resources for faculty and/or students require approval by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

If you have any questions or need any additional support, please contact me, the IRB Chair.

Best Wishes with Your Research/Study,

Mark A. Cunningham, Ph.D.  
IRB Chair  
Vice President, Institutional Effectiveness

Telephone (404) 756-4654

Facsimile (404) 756-3784

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AFFIRMATIVE ACTION INSTITUTE